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HEARING
ON
NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT
FOR FISCAL YEAR 2019
AND
OVERSIGHT OF PREVIOUSLY AUTHORIZED
PROGRAMS
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
SECOND SESSION
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS AND
CAPABILITIES HEARING
ON
**EVOLUTION, TRANSFORMATION, AND
SUSTAINMENT: A REVIEW AND
ASSESSMENT OF THE FISCAL YEAR 2019
BUDGET REQUEST FOR U.S. SPECIAL
OPERATIONS FORCES AND COMMAND**

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**EVOLUTION, TRANSFORMATION, AND SUSTAINMENT:
A REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT OF THE FISCAL YEAR 2019
BUDGET REQUEST FOR U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS
FORCES AND COMMAND**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES,
Washington, DC, Thursday, February 15, 2018.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 2:03 p.m., in room 2212, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Elise M. Stefanik (chairwoman of the subcommittee) presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ELISE M. STEFANIK, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM NEW YORK, CHAIRWOMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES

Ms. STEFANIK. The subcommittee will come to order. I am pleased to welcome everyone to this important hearing entitled, "Evolution, Transformation, and Sustainment: A Review of the Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Request for U.S. Special Operations Forces and Command." The fiscal year 2019 budget request for U.S. Special Operations Command [SOCOM] totals more than \$13.6 billion, an approximate 10 percent increase, and the largest request ever submitted. It also seeks additional personnel authorizations, putting the total size of the force above 71,000, the largest ever envisioned. While I am pleased to see continued fiscal support for special operations forces [SOF], it is deeply troubling to see continued dependency on overseas continued [contingency] operations funding [OCO]. This problem is most acute in the operations and maintenance accounts, where OCO is an alarming 33 percent.

One year ago, before this very committee, General Thomas wisely noted that such dependency has created a force that is, quote, "largely a facade," unquote. Unfortunately, we find ourselves in the same place today, if not worse. Working together, we must commit to remedy this imbalance. And I look forward to talking about concrete ways in which this committee can help, while you continue to help yourselves. This 10 percent budget increase also reminds us that we must work to ensure we are not choosing quantity over quality, and that special operations forces remain balanced across the entirety of the joint operating force and the military services, who are, themselves, experiencing near existential readiness crises.

The recently released National Defense Strategy [NDS] indeed places special operations forces central to efforts across the full spectrum of non-state and state threats. Rising and asymmetric challenges posed by Russia and China and the potential for contingencies on the Korean Peninsula impair our ongoing efforts in Af-

ghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Somalia. All this while SOF also maintains a presence in some 80 additional countries today. Now, more than ever, we run the risk of overextending our SOF forces, who are central to our national defense.

Of particular concern, we see the fight in Syria changing. More and more, our forces are engaging Russian and Syrian regime proxies, as most recently seen in the aggressive fighting in Deir al-Zour. The defeat of ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] now reveals the fingerprints of the larger geopolitical fight we are engaged in, putting at risk current authorities, frameworks, and partnerships, and not to mention the considerable risk to our forces on the ground in an already clouded and fractured battlefield.

I look forward to hearing from both of our witnesses today how our special operations forces are postured to support the new National Defense Strategy, while also continuing forward as the main line of effort in our current efforts across the globe.

A large part of this subcommittee charge is looking far ahead to consider what's next. In doing so, I see many challenges, but also great opportunities in emerging technologies such as AI [artificial intelligence], quantum computing, nanotechnology, synthetic biology, the Internet of Things, and many others that will provide a significant battlefield advantage for special operations forces and the broader joint force. We must ensure that we are doing everything we can to push the technological edge and maintain a battlefield advantage. Rest assured, our near-peer adversaries are already aggressively exploring these technologies, which present both economic and national security challenges for our Nation. To this end, I am somewhat disappointed that SOCOM's budget request decreases research and development [R&D] funding for a second year in a row. I look forward to hearing the rationale for this, and taking any necessary steps to ensure we do not lose our technological and battlefield advantages.

Needless to say, there is a lot of ground to cover today. I would like to welcome both of our witnesses, Mr. Owen West, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict [SO/LIC], and General Tony Thomas, Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command. Since this is Mr. West's first appearance before the House Armed Services Committee, let me congratulate you on your confirmation as Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations, and we look forward to working with you. I would also like now to recognize my friend and the ranking member, Jim Langevin, from Rhode Island, for any opening comments he would like to make.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Stefanik can be found in the Appendix on page 25.]

STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES R. LANGEVIN, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM RHODE ISLAND, RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you, Secretary West. I want to welcome you before the committee. And General Thomas, I want to thank you both for appearing before us today and for your service to our Nation. It is great to have you back, General. Last year in my opening statement on the U.S. Spe-

cial Operations Command budget request, I highlighted the ever-increasing demand for reliance on special operations forces by combatant commanders, as the chair has also referenced in her opening statement. Today, that demand and reliance has not decreased. In fact, under the new National Defense Strategy it will likely increase with the focus on inter-state competition with gray zone conflicts below the level of armed conflict. Our special operators have a myriad of critical skill sets that can be employed across the full spectrum of conflict, yet we must be prudent about how the force is employed, or we risk breaking the tip of the spear. After 17 years, the global counterterrorism fight is by no means over. At the same time, we must be prepared for future activities and conflicts in which potential adversaries have made gains in technologies like robotics and biotechnology, and have new capabilities aimed at achieving information dominance.

The fiscal year 2019 budget request for USSOCOM is \$13.6 billion, just 2 percent of the overall Department of Defense [DOD] request. Reflected in the request are more robust investments for enhancing SOF operations throughout the information environment, including enhanced cyber and network resiliency capabilities. As a result of section 1637 of the National Defense Authorization Act [NDAA] for FY [fiscal year] 2018, the Secretary of Defense has directed USSOCOM to establish a centralized capability for military information support operations, global messaging, and counter-messaging. The FY 2019 request includes \$18 million to that end.

This hearing provides us with an opportunity to understand how USSOCOM will fulfill its roles and responsibilities under section 1637 to better enable an enhanced approach to maximize effects from the tactical to strategic levels, while contributing to a whole-of-government effort. As in years past, much of the USSOCOM funding request, particularly in the operations and maintenance accounts, remains part of the overseas contingency operations. However, many of these activities and programs are enduring, which means their classification remains a serious concern for me. Baseline funding is crucial to provide USSOCOM stability for programming and, reflected properly, it would enable us to better understand defense spending in the current and the out-years.

In addition to a dialogue about the demands on our force, readiness for current and future contingencies, and associated resource requests, there are several legislative and policy issues at hand to discuss. This includes implementation of section 922 of the NDAA regarding the role and responsibilities of your office, Secretary West. And I look forward to hearing your vision and efforts for implementing reforms intended to empower your position to effectively conduct internal oversight and advocacy.

SOF are engaged in operational activities globally under legislative authorities carefully overseen by the committee. Section 1209 of the FY 2015 NDAA authorizes the Department to provide assistance to vetted Syrian opposition forces. SOF continue to advise and assist in the fight against ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] in Syria, where we have seen remarkable progress. A transition to stability operations has begun in many areas. So with 1209 set to expire on December 31, 2018, I would like to ask our witnesses their perspective on an extension of that authority, and how

would continued training and assistance be scoped if, in fact, an extension is granted? In closing, I, again, want to thank our witnesses for being here today, and express my gratitude to the men and women of our Armed Forces around the globe. I know you have extraordinary responsibilities and burdens on your shoulders. The Nation is grateful for the work that you do and for your service. With that, Madam Chair, I yield back.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you, Jim. And I want to take this moment to remind our members that immediately following the open hearing, the committee will reconvene right next door in 2216 for a closed, classified roundtable discussion with both of our witnesses. Before we begin, I also want to remind our witnesses that your full written statements will be submitted for the record. And we ask that you summarize those statements in 5 minutes or less for your opening statements. Secretary West, we will begin with you, and I look forward to your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF OWEN WEST, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS/LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Secretary WEST. Thank you, Chairwoman. Chairwoman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of this committee, I am honored to appear before you as the Assistant Secretary of Defense of Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict. In my short time on the job, I have been most impressed by the level of commitment demonstrated by my staff and their U.S. Special Operations Command teammates. There exists a relentless but thoughtful focus on war-fighting, which is unsurprising in an enterprise led by Secretary Mattis. I am pleased to share this opportunity with one such war-fighter. From 2001 to 2013, General Tony Thomas deployed every year to combat. He is a reflection of the force he leads, from his deployment cycle to the intellectual creativity and competitive drive he shares with his fellow operators.

I mentioned competitiveness because we have a new National Defense Strategy that clarifies my priorities, none bigger than helping General Thomas steadily build competitive advantage across the vast spectrum of warfare special operations calls home. The NDS calls for a new era, where we compete in what Secretary Mattis calls the contact layer, the daily clash of national will that occurs short of armed conflict, where your special operations forces are today building relationships and reducing the enemy. The task is to remain unpredictable but expansive, pushing the competitive boundaries in ways our enemies do not expect. To sustain this expansion, we must be fiscally hawkish, reducing asymmetry by adopting a focus on return on investment.

Overhead costs increase as you move from tooth to tail. In business, we call this upstream inflation. For example, \$500,000 in Washington, DC, can buy you a think-tank report, whereas \$500,000 deployed in the field with a captain as a chief investment officer can be leveraged into a force of highly trained indigenous allies.

Secretary Mattis' business reform efforts seek to make the force more lethal, and resource allocation that prioritizes the operating forces is the next logical step. The 127 Echo program is an example

of best practices investing. I would like to thank Congress for continuing to support 127e, which has grown from a pilot program to a \$100 million lever that has had a direct impact in steadily clawing back territory lost to ISIS to name a single impact point.

Likewise, section 1202 is an example of Congress' forward-leaning investment to counter unconventional threats. I see these authorities as part of Congress' strong and continued investment in SOF. My commitment to you is to focus on returns. USSOCOM amounts to roughly 1.9 percent of the DOD budget, which enables a global presence in 90 countries. This capital expenditure fuels the current fight, but it must also result in long-term competitive advantage.

The most important capital investment is human. Everyone on this committee is well aware of the demand inelasticity for SOF. We simply lack the supply to satisfy all customers. General Thomas has already taken the first step in sustainment by addressing dwell time, and a second step by conducting a comprehensive prioritization review. That leaves mission set.

As Secretary Mattis indicated in late December, our conventional force is capable right now of assuming some of these missions. I say that leaves mission set because our other option is growing the force. Our 2019 budget request does include modest end strength increases for SOF across each of the services, but the growth rate has slowed precipitously. SOF cannot be quickly grown. Today, we face a natural resource that is fully tapped by traditional service recruiting. Only 30 percent of high schoolers are qualified for military service. We must, therefore, explore unconventional techniques and new pools to recruit men and women who have the right stuff.

Today's battlefield has challenged the traditional definition of a combatant. Successfully operating in the global contact layer demands that we build a diverse force. The SOF entry standards are high, but America has always encouraged its pioneers. We need more candidates without military histories, we need more cultural diversity, we need more women.

SOF tryouts are life-altering experiences. The reward is joining an elite team, where the commitment to each other is as strong as the commitment to country. That human element is the key element in SOCOM. General Thomas runs a global risk-reward venture, and human failure is inevitable. When mistakes are made, one of my principal responsibilities is to ensure transparency and provide you the necessary and appropriate information. We owe it to the families, the Department [of Defense], Congress, and the American people to complete investigations with thoroughness, diligence, and timeliness.

We will take all steps necessary to protect our greatest asset, those men and women who have volunteered several times over to earn the title of special operators. Their fervent defense of our beloved Nation makes us all proud. I will never lose sight of that.

I want to end on section 922. I view Congress as a natural partner. During my confirmation hearing, I promised to remain close to Congress because of that natural partnership. There should be no surprises. The Department is reviewing the implementation of 922. General Thomas and I are partners in this effort. We will

move together to implement it. Our goal is to make SOCOM a more efficient enterprise that supports the National Defense Strategy and the Secretary of Defense. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Secretary West can be found in the Appendix on page 27.]

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you, Secretary West. General Thomas.

**STATEMENT OF GEN RAYMOND A. THOMAS, USA,
COMMANDER, U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND**

General THOMAS. Chairwoman Stefanik, Representative Langevin, and distinguished members of the committee, I am honored to appear before you to provide an update on the posture of United States Special Operations Command and our superb special operations forces. I am pleased to share the table with our new Assistant Secretary for Special Operations, Owen West. Working closely with Secretary West, we are embracing section 922 as the natural evolution of SOCOM's service-like responsibilities that Congress envisioned when you created us 31 years ago.

Let me summarize the posture of SOCOM and your special operations forces. We continue to have outsized effects around the globe, defeating our enemies, training, equipping, and enabling our friends and allies, rapidly transforming the organization to be prepared for all future threats, and caring for our fallen, wounded, and ill, and their families. Your special operations forces are doing phenomenal work. Since I last appeared before this committee, SOCOM's primary focus has continued to be on the defeat of ISIS and al-Qaida and their affiliates. Special operations forces played an integral role as part of the joint force in the destruction of ISIS's physical caliphate in Syria and Iraq.

In coordination with allied and host nation partners, special operations forces continue to confront ISIS and al-Qaida wherever they sought sanctuary: in Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, the trans-Sahel, Lake Chad basin, the Maghreb, and even as far off as the Philippines. In addition to our historic efforts to confront violent extremism, SOCOM continues to enhance our role as part of the joint force in assuring allies and improving their capabilities in the face of aggressive regional hegemony, reinforcing host nation and law enforcement efforts in the Western Hemisphere in defense of our national boundaries, and preparing for contingency operations.

Our successes are directly attributable to recruiting and training amazing Americans, outfitting them with the best equipment and training in the world, and empowering them with the requisite authorities to defeat our adversaries. Our people continue to be the decisive advantage. Congress' support continues to be key in our efforts in the form of necessary resources and specific authorities. With title 10, section 127 Echo, Congress allowed special operations forces to support vetted foreign forces against terrorist groups. It is a powerful authority directly responsible for neutralizing hundreds of enemy leaders and fighters.

Section 1209 of the 2015 NDAA allowed special operations forces to train and equip a 50,000-plus person force of vetted, Kurdish, and Arab Syrians to remove ISIS from 98 percent of the territory

they once held in Syria. 1209 played a decisive role in the military defeat of ISIS's physical caliphate.

In this year's NDAA, you provided us section 1202, an authority special operations forces will employ to support friends and dissuade aggression by strategic competitors. We think it will provide us a distinct operational advantage, and thank you for this important irregular warfare authority. Congress has continued to provide us with all the resourcing we need to do our job. As you two mentioned in your preamble and Secretary West mentioned in his, in fiscal year 2017, our budget was \$11.8 billion. Our projected budget for fiscal year 2018 is \$12.3 billion; and fiscal year 2019 is projected to be \$13.6 billion. At 1.9 percent of the total DOD budget, with roughly matching sister service contributions, special operations forces provide unique and highly effective capabilities and extraordinary return on investment across the full spectrum of conflict.

Defeating our enemies, defending the homeland, deterring adversaries, supporting allies, and fostering innovation, SOCOM operates at a fast, but manageable pace.

Since I last appeared, SOCOM service components effectively reduced the deployment tempo of our personnel, with the majority under the Secretary of Defense-directed deployment-to-dwell ratio of 1:2. Our people and our formations are better than they have ever been, thriving under pressure, executing the toughest missions, and achieving success.

Success, however, has carried a high price. In the past 10 months, we suffered the loss of 20 special operations personnel from our formation in combat, with 144 wounded and injured. I will close recounting the words of one of our Gold Star mothers at the funeral of her son, Green Beret Staff Sergeant Aaron Rhett Butler from the 19th Special Forces Group, a National Guard non-commissioned officer killed in Afghanistan this past August. Aaron was a four-time Utah State wrestling champion in high school, and the seventh of eight children. In the midst of her grief, Mrs. Butler looked me straight in the eye and said, "Stay on this. Finish it." Her resolve resonated with me, and reflects the extraordinary support we enjoy from our service member families. I know it resonates with this committee as well.

SOCOM and our special operations forces are relentlessly focused on winning our current fights and preparing for all future threats facing our Nation. Again, thank you for your trust and support for this command and our special operations forces.

[The prepared statement of General Thomas can be found in the Appendix on page 39.]

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you, General Thomas. My first question, I want to relate it back to my opening statement. This subcommittee is charged with looking 5, 10, 20 years ahead. And I am concerned that we must have a sustainable CT [counterterrorism] and countering violent extremism strategy. We have made significant tactical gains, such as recent advances in Syria, Libya, and even Somalia, but only, in some cases, to see those hard-earned gains rolled back because we lack a larger strategy and diplomatic approach that could realize the tactical gains. How do you think we

ensure that we have a strategy to build in the long term upon tactical successes? And that question is for both of you.

Secretary WEST. Why don't I talk about the strategic aspects, and Tony, you can talk operations. Chairwoman, I think you have teased out the basic question that resides in the NDS, and that is as we shift focus, how do we sustain other efforts, especially if we have to become more austere in certain buckets, while maintaining, in my judgment, what is a best-in-class, competitive advantage that General Thomas' team has built in counterterrorism?

When I look across the military missions, I am not sure if there is a bigger gap. Coming from the private sector, I think what is needed is a resource allocation model. That is underway at the Department. Secretary Mattis has begun to task people to look at an investment philosophy. Some of the things that have worked, for instance, have been partner forces. So some basic questions would be: What are the chances of success? The size of the spend? Can we turn it over to GP [General Purpose]? And then to your much larger question, how do we build an overall thesis to get us to where we want to be ahead 5 or 10 years from now?

Ms. STEFANIK. General Thomas.

General THOMAS. Chairwoman, I think I would speak comfortably for the Secretary when he would agree with your analysis that tactics without strategy, to quote Sun Tzu, is the noise before defeat. I think you emphasize, and I believe, again, the Secretary and I would both reinforce your point, that concomitant diplomatic efforts, with our operational endeavors, are critical to finishing any one of these fights. And I would specifically point right now to both Afghanistan, where we are surging assets to enable the discussions for reconciliation, which must happen to have final and sustainable security there. Obviously needs a very fervent diplomatic effort.

And in Syria right now, you mentioned earlier we are in a phase in the moment of the physical defeat of the caliphate, that we are endeavoring to provide stability to those ungoverned spaces and to those people where we have conducted operations. And that is a critical role that has to come through in conjunction with our military operations.

Ms. STEFANIK. My next question also relates to my opening statement. General Thomas, what can this committee do to reduce your dependency on OCO [overseas contingency operations]?

General THOMAS. Chairwoman, luckily, the current funding bill as it stands makes the OCO point moot for these next 2 years, as I understand it. It is only a respite, though. And so I am glad that you are emphasizing that, that currently, if we were to highlight the current dependency on OCO, it is one third of our budget, you know, a huge dependency, and I am hopeful in the out-years, that we are able to recognize that these are lasting capabilities in SOCOM, and your SOCOM that you all want to maintain, and, therefore, drive it from OCO into base [budget]. So I am hoping for that consideration in the out-years. Luckily again, I think the current budget addresses that.

Ms. STEFANIK. Secretary West, did you want to add, given your oversight role?

Secretary WEST. Chairwoman, I would just say coming in again from the private sector, I think OCO, it seems to me, I am not an

expert, but it has the potential to build some very bad habits in terms of planning. I need to dig into it more. I would be happy to get back to you with an assessment. I think it will take me about 3 months. But the potential is there to really hem what you talked about, which is beginning to transform the force out 5 or 10 years.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 65.]

Ms. STEFANIK. And then my last question for the first round is we have seen the recent incident of overseas fitness trackers that telegraphed the positions and data of our service men and women. And that reminds us, of course, of the Internet of Things continues to change the game. Can you talk about how this is impacting your approach to force protection? What did we learn from the most recent incident, and what changes have been made? And in a broader sense, how concerned are you, in general, about the proliferation of more than 50 billion interconnected sensors and devices? General Thomas.

General THOMAS. Chairwoman, I think we all had that “duh” kind of epiphany moment that the vulnerability that available databases like that can present to the force. So clearly, it was an immediate vulnerability that the Department was aware of, and that we are scrambling to make sure we have the right sort of policy in place. I think it also highlights the other aspect, though, the ability to manipulate and leverage data that we are also interested in becoming much better in the future.

So this was an eye-opening exposure, and a vulnerability to the Department for a new and developmental technology. But we are endeavoring to, one, protect what we need to in terms of available data, but also be able to leverage it operationally as well.

Ms. STEFANIK. I now recognize Mr. Langevin.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, thanks to both of our witnesses for your testimony. General Thomas, as I mentioned in my opening statement, there continues to be a high demand for reliance on—increasing reliance on special operations forces by combatant commanders. And I believe, as I know you do as well, they have to be prudent in employment of the force to maintain readiness for current and future missions, as well as preserve strategic operations for our Nation.

So I know that this issue has also been on the forefront of your mind, as we have discussed in our one-on-one meetings. And you have been vocal that SOF cannot be the solution to every problem. So can you please describe your efforts to ensure the force is employed to meet combatant commander requirements, while also addressing what I would call overreliance on SOF?

And some concrete examples for the committee to demonstrate how you’ve pushed back in cases where it wouldn’t be appropriate for SOF, and regular forces could take over the mission would be helpful. In addition to resource requirements, how can Congress be helpful on this front as well?

General THOMAS. Congressman, thanks for the question, and thanks for the time yesterday to catch up with you. As you implied, and certainly as we have looked back over the years, SOF has arguably been applied very liberally, with a dearth of strategy and with a dearth of a real vision towards end state. So while we are

out in many locations, the reality is it is hard to measure. You know, what does the end state, what does sustainable security look like? There is significant oversight from the Department, specifically from my boss, and certainly with the Assistant Secretary, to ensure that we are prioritized in terms of our placement and our operations now and into the future. And I would tell you that the strategic context is coming together more coherently every day under the leadership of Secretary Mattis.

So I am somewhat confident that we are getting that external pressure while we prioritize internally to the limited assets we have. If you were to ask me are we able to satisfy all the geographic combatant commanders' requirements, I would tell you no, we routinely tell geographic combatant commanders that we have no more to hand out at this time.

In priority, we have given them out to the respective six geographic combatant commanders. And it forces consideration for other forces, whether they are international partners, conventional forces, or other capabilities that should be brought to bear. So it is a good, vibrant, professional discussion that, I think, is getting more in balance all the time.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you. So the Army's first security force assistance brigade is going to deploy to Afghanistan this spring. Can you tell us how will that deployment to Afghanistan alleviate some of the burden on SOF? And what is your understanding of how future security force assistance brigade deployments will contribute to alleviating some of the burden on SOF?

General THOMAS. Yes, Congressman. Specifically, the security force assistance brigades [SFAB] that the Army has stood up in very rapid order—I give them a lot of credit for creating capability in little to no time—are specifically focused on the conventional Afghan kandaks, their conventional units in the field, which, right now, are not partnered, unlike our Afghan special operations force partners, who do have U.S. special forces and other allied forces aligned with them, and have been historically with them. So their specific purpose is for the conventional side. However, we are deriving some benefit from the creation of the SFAB as well.

In fact, I talked to our commander on the ground as recently as 2 days ago. We specifically will get a few of these teams that will thicken our formation at the training base as well as accompany some of our new partnered force, some of the mobile forces to allow us to be more effective in the field. We are anxious for them to get to Afghanistan, and looking forward to the benefit they will provide to us.

Mr. LANGEVIN. I am sure. I hope that achieves the goal we intend. So as a result of section 1637 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2018, the Secretary of Defense has directed USSOCOM to establish a centralized capability for military information support operations, global messaging, and counter-messaging. The FY 2019 request includes \$18 million to that end. So touch on this. How will USSOCOM fulfill its roles and responsibilities in this capacity to better understand, enable, and enhance the Department of Defense approach for maximum effects from the tactical to the strategic?

And General Thomas, how will USSOCOM contribute to a whole-of-government effort in this space? And what agencies will you coordinate with? And lastly, Secretary West, have you received any guidance or participated in efforts related to section 1637 of the FY 2018 NDAA that provides for the integration of strategic information operations and cyber-enabled information operations?

General THOMAS. Congressman, very quickly, and I will turn to the Assistant Secretary, the timing on this initiative from Congress couldn't be any better. Internally to SOCOM, we were already endeavoring to try and establish better capability at the headquarters level, in addition to our proponent—we are the proponent for military information support operations. So we produce and provided the field great capability in that regard. But we really did not have the requisite operational and potentially national level capabilities.

So we are intent on providing that. I would offer to you form follows function. And so right now, we are in discussions with the Department in terms of what functions they endeavor, or they see us fulfilling. Our form, our structure will follow from that. But again, we are appreciative of the resourcing that is involved.

We are already very, very well integrated with the Global Engagement Center. So you talked about other partners, that is the lead for the country and the State Department. We are well integrated with them, and we are hoping to enhance that relationship with them going forward, among other agencies.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you.

Secretary WEST. Sir, the SO/LIC office is tasked with helping to designate a senior DOD official. We are in the process of making recommendations right now to the Secretary. I would say from the strategic level, you asked what other agencies are involved. What is very important is that we get the message right, that it is a culturally attuned message so that no matter what we may gin up in the United States DOD, I think we need some country expertise. And then looking broadly at the formula of these types of operations, we need a partner force that begins to translate this with whom we have the same political end goals.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you both. I yield back.

Ms. STEFANIK. Mr. Wilson.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Madam Chair. And I would like to thank both members of the panel for being here. It is really reassuring on behalf of American families, your capabilities and competence, and in particular, to know that you are facing challenges from North Africa to the Philippines. And it is just encouraging to see your dedication and service. And General Thomas, a top priority is supporting the counterpropaganda mission and ensuring that the appropriate infrastructure is in place to guarantee success.

In the FY 2017 NDAA, Congress expanded the mission of the Global Engagement Center [GEC] to include counter-state propaganda and disinformation efforts. What is the level of the collaboration between SOCOM and the Global Engagement Center? Do you believe there are sufficient opportunities for the cooperation and exchange of best practices? Is there anything Congress can do to further support this mission?

General THOMAS. Thanks, Congressman, and thanks for the time to link up with you earlier. As I mentioned earlier, and kind of to

reinforce the point that we all know that relationships matter, we have had and enjoyed a very good preexisting relationship with the Global Engagement Center, primarily with a counterterrorism focus. As their charter has expanded, we are intent on being integrated with all their additional efforts and additional focus going forward. The Assistant Secretary talked about the NDS and the intent to compete short of conflict, in both a contact force and a blunt force construct as it is played out in the NDS.

I think there are extraordinary opportunities. You mentioned propaganda. I don't know that I would term it as propaganda as much as competing in the information space against the extraordinary amount of disinformation, especially on the regional, kind of hegemonic level that we do need to counter in some way, shape, or form. And again, I think we will have the opportunity to do that going forward, and we look forward to it.

Secretary WEST. Sir, let me just add that now that we have a budget, we have agreed with the State Department to launch a \$15 million pilot program alongside the GEC. And the basic goal between DOD and State is to align to the NDS.

Mr. WILSON. As an indication of how important what you are doing, we have the Chairman of the Armed Services Committee here with us, Mac Thornberry. So whatever we can do in Congress, the leadership certainly is very attentive. And Secretary West and General Thomas, another significant concern is the high operational tempo that has been placed on SOCOM for a significant period of time. Could you describe the impact of programs like the Preservation of the Force and Family [POTFF] have had on the morale of soldiers and their families? And also, describe efforts to focus on mental health services being made available to service members.

General THOMAS. Congressman, first and foremost, I am very grateful that several of my predecessors had the vision to see that this was going to be a protracted effort, both the current CT fight and really the other threats that have loomed for the country. And in seeing with that longer vision, they realized that we did not have the organic capability to sustain the force at the kind of tempo that we have been carrying now for a decade and a half. So in coordination with Congress, they endeavored to get the necessary funding to provide the Preservation of the Force and Family capabilities, which I would offer is, most importantly, the people that are involved, you know, the physical therapists, the social workers, the religious support folks, the psychiatrists—psychologists rather. Those are really the difference that is being made at the local level and our ability to sustain it. So again, thanks to my predecessors for setting that in motion. It is paying huge rewards for us in terms of sustaining the force.

Mr. WILSON. And has there been an impact on recruitment with the emphasis on these programs?

General THOMAS. I would offer more in sustainment. So recruitment, they may not know it ahead of time, but when service members and their families become part of our force, and it is probably most palpable every time I go to Walter Reed and I am able to talk to service members and their families on the back side in terms of the care coalition aspects that we are able to provide for them, that

they realize there is a distinct difference. One, we are encouraging service members, regardless of their injury, their illness, to stay in the force. And if they want to, we find ways to do that. And we are also able to sustain their families so they can, you know, work with us for the long haul. And again, it is almost indescribably powerful for our formation.

Mr. WILSON. And I know that the facilities that you have developed have to—if a young person sees the world-class facilities that are being provided, it has just got to encourage people to remain in the service, but also recruiting. So it is just so meaningful. And just again, thank both of you for your service, and I yield back.

Ms. STEFANIK. Mrs. Murphy.

Mrs. MURPHY. Mr. West, General Thomas, thank you so much for being here today. And thank you, General Thomas, for taking a little time out of your schedule this morning to connect. In a prior life, I had the real honor to work for ASD SO/LIC in the SOCT [Special Operations & Combatting Terrorism] Directorate, and I have a deep appreciation for the capabilities that SOF brings to our national security. So thank you for all that you do. You talked a little bit about this in your opening remarks. Just given the new National Defense Strategy refocuses on great power conflict, will SOCOM seek to transition away from CVE [countering violent extremism] to other roles that more directly counter the military capabilities of peer competitors? And if so, what does that look like?

Secretary WEST. Well, from one rookie to a veteran, I would say, as I said in the opening, that is a key question. I think, first of all, what is important, is sustaining the advantage that SOCOM has built up in countering VEO [violent extremist organizations]. But then along with many other programs and missions, we do have to become more austere. And so hard decisions have to be made in terms of when you begin to look from—essentially move from, I will use a start-up as an example, and you really begin to ask or assess what are diminishing returns, which are inevitable, against your spend.

So, I think one of my basic tasks will be to work alongside General Thomas on the business administrative aspect of SOCOM. And part of that is just how he allocates his dollars and his mission prioritization.

General THOMAS. Congresswoman, I would like to think we anticipated the NDS a little bit in regards to one specific peer competitor, and that was at the invitation of our European allies, folks who we worked with in Afghanistan and Iraq, we were invited several years ago to join them in enhancing their capabilities in Eastern Europe. So we have had a multiyear effort there that has already borne some pretty serious dividends. I think we have already flexed in that regard. It opened our eyes to some capabilities that we were probably deficient in that we needed to enhance above and beyond the great capabilities we had developed for countering violent extremism. But we are an organization in transformation constantly, and I would like to think that we are keeping pace with where the NDS wants us to go.

Mrs. MURPHY. Great. And I look forward to continuing the conversation as you make that transition. You know I have had the pleasure of touring the SOFWERX a few times, and I am so im-

pressed by it, I even brought colleagues down to take a peek at what you have got going on there. It is your business and technology incubator in downtown Tampa. I am just so very impressed every time I visit at how SOCOM uses flexible alternative contracting instruments like OTAs [other transaction authority] to such great effect. And I think when we think about some of the challenges that we are looking to address, having that ability to sort of hotwire the system a little bit and get into more rapid acquisitions is really important. And I have been impressed with your ability to do that.

When I visited SOCOM headquarters late last year, I heard that your acting acquisition officer was detailed to CYBERCOM [U.S. Cyber Command] to help stand up their acquisition authority. Can you talk a little bit about SOCOM and CYBERCOM's relationship, particularly as it relates to sharing best practices in acquisitions?

General THOMAS. Congressman, first of all, thanks for your interest in SOFWERX. And if I could actually go back to a question that the chairwoman asked about RDT&E [research, development, test, and evaluation], because truthfully, there was an internal tension in our command on, are we putting sufficient money there? And so it is very prominent. But I would offer platforms like SOFWERX, other people's money, our ability to leverage academia, and then truthfully, as we are working with the Department, we had Ellen Lord down recently, and it struck me as she talks about \$5 trillion worth of programs over the FYDP [Future Years Defense Program], that SOCOM needs to do a better job of leveraging the heft of the Department as it is swinging larger RDT&E dollars. So we are focused on it, but there are a couple different platforms.

SOFWERX is unique, as you described. And we have been able to parlay it. Originally, I don't think it was seen as something that was either scalable or exportable, and it has become both. Scalable in terms of how it is assisting other services. The Army has used it to look at ground mobility vehicles, weapons, things like that. On our RDT&E back, which, again, it is a great cooperative effort. Exportable in terms of you mentioned CYBERCOM. It is also exportable to our foreign partners. We are able to share much more extensively right now. On your specific point of the relationship with CYBERCOM, you know, Admiral Mike Rogers and I have had kind of a historic relationship, very positive one from growing up together. But he encouraged us at Special Operations to leverage cyber in everything we are doing. He knows that SOCOM has an attractiveness in terms of an operational approach that is not irresistible, but it certainly—it forces considerations. So cyber operations is integral to everything we do. And we continue to enhance the relationship with them, most recently, in trying to help them with their acquisition process.

Ms. STEFANIK. Time has expired. Mr. Hice.

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Madam Chair. General Thomas, you mentioned a while ago the Preservation of the Force and Family. I am very much interested in that. Of course, there is so much stress on our warriors and their families. I think this is a great program that now is 5 years old. You mentioned it is dealing with physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being. And that program expires this year, although a request for proposal has just come out this week.

To begin, after 5 years now what have you learned from this program? And does the new request, what kind of changes are being proposed?

General THOMAS. Congressman, I think as a learning organization, with the establishment of the Preservation of the Force and Family program, we really hinged it on four pillars: psychological, spiritual, social, and human performance aspects. And so, we have been able to refine that over time as much driven by our operators, as most of our successes are, where they are able to refine both the requirements, but also, the ability to sustain the force over time.

So again, it builds in resilience on the front end. And as we employ this force, and then parallel to that is our care coalition, which enables us to conduct an incredibly thorough Warrior Care Program for those who unfortunately become wounded, ill, or injured. So, in parallel, both those programs are keys to our sustainment going forward. We are continuing looking to how we can enhance that program. So I probably can come back to you with some more specifics. But it is an iterative program inside of what we have been doing very capably for the last couple of years.

Mr. HICE. So are you aware of any significant changes from what is being proposed now from 5 years ago?

General THOMAS. I don't think significant changes. I think probably a point that I should bring out to you is, again, imitation being the finest form of flattery, the other services are going to school on what we are doing and trying to implement it. And we are trying to share that as aggressively as possible. So I think we are onto something that is positive for not only our force, but for the larger Department. And I will get back to you on some specifics that we are considering.

[The information referred to can be found in the Appendix on page 65.]

Mr. HICE. Thank you. Mr. West.

Secretary WEST. I was just going to say, sir, not to be a force of negativity, but part of my job will be and is to scrutinize P-11 programs, or SOF-peculiar programs like this, where the services have something that looks like it, but not quite. I usually dive into the statistics. And the statistics I have seen so far are really good. I am sure we will get into the results of the cultural survey that was commissioned about 3 months ago here. But my initial cut at the data says that something is working well, and I would have to point to this program as among, say, of the flagship programs that I would think has a big impact.

Mr. HICE. That is really encouraging to hear. Would you say, while you are up here, that between the four pillars that they are fairly well balanced, or is there an imbalance and emphasis in one area over the other?

Secretary WEST. I don't know, sir. I don't know, sir.

Mr. HICE. General, would you?

General THOMAS. Congressman, I think it is pretty balanced. Where we are I think endeavoring to develop, because we are learning, is in the human performance domain. I think there is a lot of uncharted ground there. We have sports teams going to school on us, professional teams going to school on what we are

learning. So I think it is indicative of an environment where there is some real opportunities, but we haven't developed them yet.

Mr. HICE. I think it is really encouraging that this program is even here. The importance of taking care of these warriors and their families is just huge. And hats off to you for taking this seriously, and for doing a good job, and the fact that statistically, there are evidence to back up that this is succeeding in what its mission and purpose is. It is very encouraging. So I thank you very much for that. And I yield back.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you, Mr. Hice. We will now go to the second round of questions. General Thomas, you touched upon this in response to Mrs. Murphy's question, but as I mentioned in my opening statement, we know that our near-peer adversaries are investing in the development of AI, synthetic biology, quantum computing. And again, we are the Emerging Threats Subcommittee, so we are looking to the future to ensure that we maintain the edge when it comes to these technological tools. With that said, can you describe, and you said there was back and forth within SOCOM, why the budget request decreases our R&D investments for the second year in a row?

General THOMAS. Chairwoman, I probably didn't address that accurately in that while there is tension for where and how we are spending our money, I am comfortable that we are sufficiently immersed in R&D efforts with both our allotted money, other people's money, and other platforms. So I can probably give you a more comprehensive laydown where I guess the proof of the point is, I can't tell you an area that I think we are lacking in terms of spending authority to pursue RDT&E.

On the specifics of machine learning, that is a great example, because there is probably nothing I am more passionate about right now than the opportunities that SOCOM has to leverage machine learning to an extraordinary level. We had the innovation group come to us with Admiral McRaven about a year and a half ago, and some senior folks from Google and Alphabet gave us rave remarks for our people, our ability to prototype, and then gave us less than satisfactory marks for machine learning. And we took it as a tasker.

And since that time, we have poured a lot of energy, a lot of focus, more importantly, practical applications into everything we are doing. I devoured a book, "Machine, Platform, Crowd," not too long ago by McAfee from up at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology], that challenges corporations, but apropos to us, at every level and every mark, why you aren't embracing machine learning. And I can tell you that is the ethos of our command right now as we are going forward. I really hope that we not only will we improve our own capabilities, but that it will be scalable to the Department as kind of an exemplar for what we can do.

Ms. STEFANIK. So are we leveraging DARPA [Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency] and service R&D efforts? In what areas are they helping you the most?

General THOMAS. Ma'am, I would probably be hard-pressed right now to tell you the specifics, but the answer is yes. Anybody and everybody who—I couch this free money, that is not meant to be kind of pejorative, it is folks that are doing similar lines of work

or similar interested areas, we are investing in. I think that the beauty of it and where it plays to our maybe us not having the RDT&E, is we provide platform, we provide the forum for applications of a lot of these prototypical efforts that I think creates kind of a symbiotic marriage of opportunity there.

Ms. STEFANIK. And General Thomas, in terms of countering unconventional warfare [UW] threats, are we closer to linking all of our tools and capabilities, such as conventional, unconventional, economic, cyber, intel, and IO [information operations] in an effort to counter adversarial threats such as Russia?

General THOMAS. Chairwoman, I would like to actually give you a few examples in the closed session afterwards, but the bottom line is yes. I think the unique approach of our joint task force, our inherent nature of who we are allows us to bring all those elements to bear in a coordinated, coherent fashion. So again, I will provide at least one very powerful vignette in the closed session, but we see and we leverage all those tools as part of what we do.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you for that, General Thomas. And before I recognize Mr. Langevin, I just wanted to follow up on Secretary West's comments regarding irregular warfare authority. Regarding section 1202 and the new unconventional warfare authority, I was pleased to see you commit to the delivery of the UW strategy in the opening statement, but I do want to emphasize for the record that without that strategy, there is no UW authority, which is why we have the 15-day notice and wait as well. So we look forward to talking about the strategy first before we move forward with the authority. And with that, I recognize Mr. Langevin.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you, Madam Chair. Secretary West, section 922 of the FY 2017 NDAA focused on solidifying and strengthening the roles and responsibilities of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict to effectively conduct internal oversight of, and advocacy on behalf of SOCOM. I know you are new, you are just days on the job, but from your standpoint right now initially, what is the status of the implementation of 922, and what is the status of the report on implementation of 922 required by section 1074 of the FY 2018 bill? And as you know, Congress has expressed concern about inadequate resources being provided to ASD SO/LIC to fill roles and responsibilities. What efforts are underway to define and resource SO/LIC?

Secretary WEST. Congressman, let me take your second question first. We will turn in that report on time. Another report was just mentioned. I like to meet deadlines. To your first question, the first thing I did was study the history. I think pathfinding requires, you know, where you are coming from to figure out where you are going. It is clear this was almost a 30-year culminating point, 922 specifically. And I think it is very timely. In the backdrop of Secretary Mattis calling for business reform as one of his three pillars, I think this reinvigoration is long overdue.

General Thomas has a really unique role in that he is a very busy COCOM [combatant command] commander with three separate global synchronization hats. And then now at \$13.6 billion, he and we now are heading a Fortune 500 enterprise. So on the business leadership front, I think the basic task is to institutionalize

what SOCOM does very well and preserve its unique attributes. The chairwoman mentioned, for instance, DARPA. I think there are four or five other areas at DOD that looks very much like DARPA. So one of our tasks will be within the building to connect this thriving enterprise in Tampa Bay to the federation.

Mr. LANGEVIN. General Thomas, and both Secretary West, can you describe how 922 has shaped the relationship between SOCOM and SO/LIC? Any further comments on that? General Thomas, you want to comment?

General THOMAS. Congressman, as I mentioned in my preamble, we are embracing the 922 language as the natural evolution of the relationship between us and ASD SO/LIC. I have been interested in the specific language that places Assistant Secretary of Defense West in our chain of command to the Secretary for the man, train, and equip portfolio. And I am looking forward to developing the specific functions and interrelations there. But I think that will help us be better integrated with the Department going forward.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Thank you. General Thomas, in December you were quoted on the devastating effects Task Force Aries delivered when synchronized with other military and intelligence partners. Despite these types of operations, you mentioned that we are not fully where you would like to be with these capabilities. Can you please describe your cyber requirements? How is USSOCOM synchronizing and coordinating with U.S. Cyber Command? And do you find you have more policy and authority challenges or commanders who have difficulty integrating the capability in the cyber realm?

General THOMAS. Congressman, again, we enjoy an extraordinary and historic relationship with CYBERCOM. The level of support is almost indescribably powerful. When I mentioned and contrasted very successful operations there relative to areas that I think we can improve, it is really emphasizing that in the counter violent extremist mission set, we have been able to break ground and really be a pathfinder for new and developmental capabilities that I think need to be carried over to other mission sets, to other operational domains that I think Mike Rogers would agree, we need some iterations, we need some reps [representatives] in those environments, which we have had a good number in countering violent extremism, but I think they could be passed across, and we are trying to do that.

Mr. LANGEVIN. Very good. Thank you. And General Thomas, what is the situation with North Korea? How has that impacted the force? And is SOF prepared to respond to a crisis on the peninsula?

General THOMAS. Congressman, as part of the joint force, we are always endeavoring to be prepared for any and all contingencies. So suffice it to say, we are training, as we always have, to be prepared for that contingency, among others.

Mr. LANGEVIN. And I will probably have some follow-up on the closed session on that. With that, I yield back.

Ms. STEFANIK. Mr. Hice.

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Madam Chair. At this time I have no further questions.

Ms. STEFANIK. Mrs. Murphy.

Mrs. MURPHY. Madam Chair, I will also reserve for the closed session.

Ms. STEFANIK. Thank you very much. We will now move into closed session.

[Whereupon, at 3:00 p.m., the subcommittee proceeded in closed session.]

A P P E N D I X

FEBRUARY 15, 2018

PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

FEBRUARY 15, 2018

Opening Statement
Chairwoman Elise M. Stefanik
Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee
“Evolution, Transformation, and Sustainment: A Review of the Fiscal
Year 2019 Budget Request for U.S. Special Operations Forces and
Command”
February 15, 2018

The subcommittee will come to order.

I am pleased to welcome everyone to this very important hearing entitled, “Evolution, Transformation, and Sustainment: A Review of the Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Request for U.S. Special Operations Forces and Command.”

The fiscal year 2019 budget request for U.S. Special Operations Command totals more than \$13.6 billion dollars, an approximate 10% increase, and the largest request ever submitted. It also seeks additional personnel authorizations, putting the total size of the force above 71,000; the largest ever envisioned.

While I am pleased to see continued fiscal support for Special Operations Forces, it is deeply troubling to see continued dependency on Overseas Continued Operations funding. This problem is most acute in the Operations and Maintenance accounts where OCO is an alarming 33%. One year ago, before this very committee, General Thomas wisely noted that such dependency has created a force that is “largely a façade.” Unfortunately, we find ourselves in the same place today, if not worse. Working together, we must commit to remedy this imbalance, and I look forward to talking about concrete ways in which this committee can help, while you continue to help yourselves.

This 10% budget increase also reminds us that we must work to ensure we are not choosing quantity over quality; and that Special Operations Forces remain balanced across the entirety of the Joint Operating Force and the Military Services, who are themselves experiencing near-existential Readiness crises.

The recently released National Defense Strategy indeed places Special Operations Forces central to efforts across the full spectrum of non-state and state threats. Rising and asymmetric challenges posed by Russia and China, and the potential for contingencies on the Korean peninsula, impair our ongoing efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Somalia. All this, while SOF also maintains a presence in some 80 additional countries today. Now, more than ever, we run the risk of over-extending our Special Operations Forces who are central to our national defense.

Of particular concern, we see the fight in Syria changing. More and more, our forces are engaging Russian and Syrian regime proxies, as most

recently seen in the aggressive fighting in Der az-Zur.. The defeat of ISIS now reveals the fingerprints of the larger geo-political fight we are engaged in, putting at risk current authorities, frameworks, and partnerships. And, not to mention, the considerable risk to our forces on the ground in an already clouded and fractured battlefield.

I look forward to hearing from both of our witnesses today how our Special Operations Forces are postured to support the new National Defense Strategy, while also continuing forward as the main line of effort in our current efforts across the globe.

A large part of this subcommittee's charge is looking far ahead to consider "What's Next?" In doing so – I see many challenges, but also great opportunities in emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Quantum computing, nanotechnology, Synthetic Biology, The Internet of Things, and many others that will provide a significant battlefield advantage for Special Operations Forces and the broader Joint Force. We must ensure that we are doing everything we can to push the technological edge and maintain a battlefield advantage. Rest assured, our near-peer adversaries are already aggressively exploring these technologies, which present both economic and national security challenges for our nation.

To this end, I am somewhat disappointed that SOCOM's budget request decreases Research and Development funding for a second year in a row. I look forward to hearing the rationale for this and taking any necessary steps to ensure we do not lose our technological and battlefield advantages.

Needless to say, we have a lot of ground to cover today.

I would like to welcome both of our witnesses:

- Mr. Owen West, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict; and,
- General Tony Thomas, Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command

Since this is Mr. West's first appearance before the House Armed Services Committee, let me congratulate you on your confirmation as Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations, and we look forward to working with you.

I'd like to turn now to my friend and Ranking Member, Mr. Jim Langevin from Rhode Island, for any comments he'd like to make.

STATEMENT OF
HONORABLE OWEN WEST
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
SPECIAL OPERATIONS AND LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT

BEFORE THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES

FEBRUARY 15, 2018

Chairwoman Stefanik, Ranking Member Langevin, and distinguished Members of the House Armed Services Subcommittee, I am honored to appear before you as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD(SO/LIC)). In my short time on the job, I've been most impressed by the level of commitment demonstrated by my staff and their U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) teammates. There exists a relentless but thoughtful focus on warfighting, which is unsurprising in an enterprise led by Secretary Mattis.

I am pleased to share this opportunity with one such warfighter. General Tony Thomas has led Special Operations units from a Ranger platoon in Grenada to the Commander of USSOCOM, founded by the Armed Services Committees 31 years ago. From 2001 to 2013, General Thomas deployed every year to Afghanistan, with the exception of 2007 when he deployed to Iraq. General Thomas is not only the leader of our Special Operations Forces (SOF), but also a reflection of their unflinching dedication, intellectual creativity, and competitive drive.

I mention competitiveness because we have a new National Defense Strategy (NDS) that defines the Secretary's strategic aims and explains my priorities, none bigger than helping General Thomas and the Service Chiefs steadily build competitive advantages across the vast spectrum of war where our Special Operations Forces thrive. With the new NDS, we will be looking beyond USSOCOM's lead role in countering terrorism, to recognizing SOF as a critical component in all aspects of warfighting.

Our relationship with Congress is critical to building SOF's competitive advantage in core mission areas, and Congress continues to demonstrate strong support to SOF and their families. Thank you. In my statement from my confirmation hearing last July, I committed to

maintaining a close relationship with Members and staff of this committee, and I look forward to using today's opportunity to build on my commitment to you.

As a Nation, we face long-term competition against revisionist and revanchist powers that are employing unconventional tactics used by rogue states, terrorists, and other non-state actors. Some may call this asymmetric warfare. But enemy tactics are only asymmetric if we respond with traditional deterrence and expenditure. The NDS calls for a new era where we compete in what Secretary Mattis calls "the contact layer" – the daily clash of national will that occurs short of traditional armed conflict - where our Special Operations Forces are today building relationships with allies and partners while reducing our enemies.

Secretary Mattis also directs the Department to, "Build a more lethal, innovative joint force, postured to execute multi-domain operations with a robust system of allies and partners." Our Nation's Special Operators, in many ways, already epitomize the lethal, agile force the Secretary describes, but they must evolve to match the expanding capabilities of our adversaries. From cyber mayhem to militia-enabled territorial expansion, our enemies and competitors have moved into the gaps. This means the Department of Defense (DoD) must prioritize resource investments and press forward with business reforms to ensure our Nation maintains the competitive edge in this fight.

I am committed to building on the United States' more than three-decade investment in USSOCOM. We will do this by investing in education, training, and equipment to enhance lethality and warfighter readiness, as directed by the NDS. To increase lethality, we will rebalance resources to prioritize intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, precision strike, mobility, and cyber capabilities. In support of readiness, our Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 budget request includes modest end-strength increases from each of the Military Services to expand

SOF enablers, while still meeting high standards. We need to strengthen our operator recruitment pipelines to ensure we can meet our end-strength requirements with the most qualified personnel.

Building on our investment in SOF also requires consideration of USSOCOM's new responsibilities, assigned by the Department in the last two years: Coordinating Authority to Counter Violent Extremist Organizations and the Coordinating Authority to Counter Weapons of Mass Destruction. We must guarantee success in our investment. These are no-fail missions. We will sustain our investments to counter violent extremist organizations, with less reliance on costly platforms, and we will increase our capabilities to counter WMD with effective, forward-thinking capabilities.

I would like to thank Congress for continuing to support Title 10 U.S. Code Section 127e funding, which has grown from a modest pilot program into a \$100 million lever that has had direct effects in contested spaces. Likewise, Section 1202, enacted in the FY 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, is an example of Congress's forward-leaning investment to counter unconventional threats. However, before we utilize 1202, the Department looks forward to submitting the 1097 strategy on countering unconventional warfare. Further, Section 1022 has enabled USSOCOM to help target and disrupt ISIS's finances. I see these authorities as part of Congress's strong and continuing investment in SOF. My commitment to you is continued focus on operational and strategic returns. USSOCOM accounts for approximately 1.9 percent of the overall Defense budget, which enables a global SOF presence in 90 countries. This capital expenditure fuels the current fight. But it must also result in long-term competitive advantage over the vast spectrum of irregular warfare.

Building on our Nation's investment in SOF requires unrelenting financial stewardship. For the Department, no dollar spent is inconsequential. My team, working with USSOCOM, will always press for efficiency. Cost savings mean further re-investment to ensure SOF is ready to fight today and in the future.

Our Nation's Special Operators are the best in the world; however, they are victims of their success. We know they will succeed in any environment and against insurmountable odds. We almost take for granted that they will always be the first in, complete the mission, stand the watch, and keep us safe. They are an outstanding and unmatched force, but our Nation's demands and expectations of a high-operational tempo challenge our uniformed men and women. Given their high levels of training, specialized skills and unique capabilities, everyone on this committee is well aware that the supply of SOF is relatively inelastic. We simply lack the supply to satisfy all customers.

I agree, as I know General Thomas does, with the long-held SOF truth that humans are more important than hardware, and I admire General Thomas's work and drive with the Preservation of the Force and Family Program (POTFF). POTFF exemplifies how we can meet the requirement for sustaining force readiness, preserving unit integrity, and prolonging the careers of operators. It includes everything from sustaining peak performance and recovery from injury to supporting psychological, social, and spiritual health. From this work, we've already seen important changes. SOF suicide rates have dropped by approximately 70 percent over the past five years, data from 2013 to 2016 show a downward trend in divorce rates, and behavioral health services utilization has nearly doubled. These trends suggest the Force is getting healthier, but we must continue to do more. I look forward to partnering with General Thomas

and Congress to continue to build on this important effort for the benefit of our most important asset- our people.

In addition to his work with POTFF, General Thomas is addressing sustainment by closely monitoring operations tempo and personnel tempo. He is working to make sure the Department's goal of 1:2 dwell ratio is equally realized across all SOF. This includes a careful look at where we have low-density, high-demand units, and are adjusting accordingly, as well as analysis of how time completing professional military education and maintaining competency requirements may detract from the 1:2 ratio.

The mission set drives supply and demand of SOF. As Secretary Mattis indicated in late December last year, we need to look at the line that separates conventional operating forces from SOF, and seek to take greater advantage of the "common capabilities" of our exceptional conventional forces. Although this shift will require careful consideration of the mission set for each request for forces, the spectrum can be permanently narrowed even in traditional SOF roles, as is the case with the Army's new Security Force Assistance Brigades.

As mentioned earlier, our FY 2019 budget request does include modest end-strength increase for SOF across each of the Services; however, today, we face a natural resource that is fully tapped by traditional Service recruiting. For example, only 30 percent of high schoolers meet the standards for military service. We know this pool shrinks further when we consider the demanding assessment, selection, and training pipeline for SOF. For example, the Army's FY 2018 production requirement for Special Operators is 685, officers and enlisted combined, with the expectation to fill only 470 spots as a result of the expected 29% selection rate of the 1,950 soldiers who will enter the Army's SOF assessment and selection pipeline. We face the hard truth that SOF cannot be quickly grown.

Although we will not change the requirements and standards, we can work within the Department to rethink how we recruit to sustain manpower. Therefore, we must explore unconventional techniques and new pools to recruit the men and women who have the right stuff. Today's battlefield challenges the traditional definition of a combatant. Successfully operating in the contact layer and maintaining a presence in 90 countries around the world demands that we build a diverse force. The barrier to SOF entry is high. But the United States has always encouraged its pioneers. We need more candidates without military family histories; we need more cultural diversity; we need more women. SOF tryouts are life altering experiences, and, as we look at how we recruit and retain the best, we must message a career in SOF to attract a more diverse pool of candidates. The reward is joining an elite team where the commitment to each other is as strong as the absolute commitment to Country.

General Thomas runs a global risk-reward enterprise, and human failure is inevitable. When something happens, one of my principle responsibilities is to ensure transparency and provide you the necessary and appropriate information to perform proper oversight of Special Operations. We owe it to the families, the Department, Congress, and the American people to complete investigations with thoroughness, diligence, and timeliness. Then we must learn, change, and improve. We will take all steps necessary to protect our greatest asset – those men and women who have volunteered several times over to earn the title of Special Operators.

As requested by the House Armed Services Committee, SO/LIC and USSOCOM are preparing a briefing on the Department's assessment of the culture and accountability within SOF. To gather data for the assessment, SO/LIC and USSOCOM designed a command-wide survey with questions focused on various topics of concern. General Thomas personally encouraged the force to give frank and honest feedback. I am confident that SOF represents the

best of our uniformed services, but I also think the results will provide insights to help us prioritize placing limited resources where they are needed most. Our teams look forward to briefing your staff on the findings.

Just as General Thomas has myriad operational capabilities, we in the SO/LIC have a wide range of policy responsibilities, ranging from peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, to countering illicit trafficking, irregular warfare, counterterrorism, and large-scale Special Operations. Albeit in a short tenure to date, I am impressed with the SO/LIC's staff's commitment to carrying out oversight responsibilities and developing policies to support USSOCOM and the Joint Force's irregular warfare competencies. I believe this work is critical to our Nation's continual success in the contact layer - where we operate short of armed conflict. I'd like to share a few examples:

- The Office of Counternarcotics and Global Threats (CN>) works hand-in-hand with USSOCOM to ensure that the Command excels in its role as the global synchronizer for DoD counter-threat finance, or CTF. This partnership aided in degrading ISIS's finances and is contributing to ISIS's defeat on the battlefield. Also, this same collaboration is supporting strikes against Taliban controlled illicit drug laboratories in Afghanistan to diminish Taliban revenue. CN> also provides DoD support to U.S. law enforcement partners' efforts to counter transnational organized crime when vital national security interests are at stake. Countering transnational organized crime is a priority for the President, and through my office, DoD is performing an appropriate supporting role.
- The Office of Stability and Humanitarian Affairs is re-writing DoD's stabilization policy, consolidating our core responsibilities to security, public order, and meeting the immediate needs of the population. The new policy will emphasize small-footprint, partner-focused

stabilization activities by, with, and through local and interagency partners; and will focus on supporting stabilization in conflict zones where our interagency partners are challenged to operate. Stabilization is a key component of all phases of major armed conflict and is a critical element of the persistent SOF-led irregular warfare fight. In Syria, for instance, DoD plays a crucial role in supporting interagency stabilization efforts – contributing to the 2018 National Defense Strategy objective of “enabling U.S. interagency counterparts to advance U.S. influence and national security interests.”

- The Combating Terrorism Technical Support Office (CTTSO) is on the frontline of identifying and developing capabilities to combat terrorism and irregular adversaries. Currently, SOF in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan are countering ISIS’ small unmanned aerial drones with systems developed by CTTSO.
- The Office of Special Operations and Combatting Terrorism works hand-in-hand with USSOCOM to implement the Secretary’s Section 127e authority, supporting foreign forces, irregular forces, groups, or individuals, that act in support of operations conducted by U.S. SOF. Consisting of 21 programs across the globe, our partnership enables the Department to apply a modest portion of our annual budget to deliver critical support to willing partners resulting in decisive battlefield results in our fight to defeat ISIS and al Qa’ida.

I would also like to highlight several other initiatives I oversee that are very important to the Department. These include: ensuring that DoD does its utmost to protect civilians in conflict; applying Leahy Law to restrict training, equipment, or other assistance to foreign security forces that commit gross violations of human rights; and pressing forward with the Woman’s Peace and Security Program to promote inclusion of women in national security affairs and prevent gender-based violence throughout the world. These efforts demonstrate our resolve to execute sound

military strategies that protect civilians, maintain the support of partner governments, and enhance the legitimacy and sustainability of U.S. operations.

Further, as Secretary Mattis's senior civilian advisor for irregular warfare, I co-chair the department's Irregular Warfare and Security Force Assistance Executive Steering Committee with the Director for Joint Force Development (J7) from the Joint Staff. VADM Scott and I are committed to ensuring the Joint Force as a whole sustains its hard-won competency in irregular warfare, adapts to meet rapidly evolving irregular threats, and develops more efficient and effective methodologies to expand the competitive space.

Secretary Mattis has repeatedly reminded us that we are a Department of war and that we must be prepared to deal with an increasingly complex global security situation. SO/LIC's oversight responsibilities and policy development lay the groundwork for the Department's success in the "contact layer," and guarantee that SOF and our Joint Force maintain the competitive advantage in the irregular warfare fight that the United States is currently engaged in globally, and particularly across much of the Middle East, North Africa, and Eastern Europe.

I want to end on Section 922. I view Congress through two lenses. You are both our founders and our board of directors. During my confirmation hearing, I promised to remain close to this group because of that natural partnership. I equate it to the relationship between the board and the executive committee. There should be no surprises. So it should come as no surprise that 922 has reinvigorated and redefined the relationship between SO/LIC and SOCOM. General Thomas and I are partners in a new venture. SO/LIC will lead this partnership, as we move forward together on implementing 922. In the National Defense Strategy, Secretary Mattis writes that the department needs urgent change. 922 is one small example in terms of personnel,

but it has the potential to provide lasting leverage by institutionalizing SOCOM's unique skillset as part of the dominant joint force of the future.

As we look forward, SOF will continue to maintain the competitive advantage in the face of intensifying pressure. In my position as the Assistant Secretary, I am committed to working with Congress and USSOCOM to ensure we have an effective and agile structure of policies, authorities, resources, and oversight to guarantee the success, in any operating environment, of our Special Operators. We must keep sight of who we serve and be doing everything we can to ensure these brave warriors have the best training, equipment, and overall support we can possibly provide. In executing our mission, SO/LIC will continue to partner with General Thomas to prioritize our greatest asset: people. This includes widening the net to recruit our Nation's best. By establishing the balance among these objectives, we can employ SOF effectively in defense of our Nation. I thank Congress for its continuing support of our men and women in uniform and their families, and I look forward to your questions.

Owen West**Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict**

Mr. Owen West is the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict. Previously, Mr. West worked for Goldman, Sachs as an energy trader. He has 19 years of experience in risk-management and the most volatile international markets, leading the global natural gas and U.S. power businesses.

While at Goldman, Mr. West took two leaves of absence to activate and deploy with fellow Marines to Iraq. In 2003 he was the fire support officer for Force Recon Company and in 2006 he deployed as an advisor to an Iraqi infantry battalion holding a remote outpost in Anbar Province, where he led a group of 12 soldiers and Marines living among 500 Iraqi soldiers.

Mr. West is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. He was a Director of the Positive Coaching Alliance, and is a certified trainer of youth coaches and a multi-sport coach for his two boys. He is also a Director of the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation. Mr. West and his wife have founded two cornerstone scholarships benefitting the children of fallen troops.

He is the author of three books about military affairs. *Sharkman Six* (Simon and Schuster, 2001) won the Boyd literary award for best military novel. *The Snake Eaters* (Simon and Schuster, 2012) detailed the combat advisory mission in Iraq. He has written dozens of articles and op-eds on the military and adventure sports published in several publications such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Slate*, *Men's Journal*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Topic*, and *The New York Times*.

Mr. West graduated cum laude from Harvard College as a Government major and was commissioned in the Marine Corps where he served for 6 years as a platoon commander and a reconnaissance platoon commander.

He twice deployed overseas to Asia and the Middle East before attending Stanford Business School. At Stanford, Mr. West was co-president of his class and the CEO of Challenge for Charity, the largest business school non-profit corporation.

STATEMENT OF

GENERAL RAYMOND A. THOMAS, III, U.S. ARMY
COMMANDER
UNITED STATES SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND

BEFORE THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGING THREATS AND CAPABILITIES
FEBRUARY 15, 2018

Opening Remarks

Chairwoman Stefanik and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide an update on the posture of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and your superb Special Operations Forces (SOF). Today, I will update you on issues addressed in last year's posture statement, inform you on how SOF are proceeding in our current fights, and share USSOCOM plans and intentions for the future.

Since I last appeared before this Committee, USSOCOM's priority effort continued to be Countering Violent Extremist Organizations (CVEO). Over the past ten months, SOF played an integral role as part of the Joint Force to defeat the physical caliphate of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In addition, we were able to play a key supporting role enabling the sovereign forces of the Philippines—resulting in the dismantling of a declared ISIS province and the liberation of Marawi. Elsewhere, in coordination with allied and host nation partners SOF continued to confront ISIS and Al Qaeda (AQ) wherever they sought sanctuary, in Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Somalia, the Trans-Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, and the Maghreb. Wherever ISIS and AQ aspired to develop and seek sanctuary, SOF have been involved in efforts to defeat them and enabled partners not only to destroy them but also address the conditions that allowed these groups to thrive.

In an increasingly competitive global environment, SOF also stood with our European and Asian allies and partners providing assurance and enhanced capabilities against aggressive revisionist power that threaten them. In the Southern Hemisphere we continued to work closely with host nation governments, law enforcement agencies, and the Department of Homeland Security to ensure the security of our country. At the Headquarters level we continue to move out aggressively on our assigned mission of coordinating the Department's activities in Combatting

Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD) as well as pursuing industry leading transformational efforts to ensure we provide the most lethal and capable Special Operations Forces in support of our national security priorities. Constituting approximately 2% of the Department of Defense (DoD) budget and 3% of manpower I believe your Special Operations Forces continue to provide exceptional return on investment.

SOF Posture and the Strategic Environment

The recently released National Defense Strategy (NDS) describes “an increasingly complex global security environment, characterized by overt challenges to the free and open international order and the re-emergence of long-term, strategic competition between nations.”¹ U.S. prosperity and security is confronted by strategic competition by the “revisionist powers” of China and Russia,² and “Rogue regimes” such as North Korea and Iran which destabilize regions by pursuing weapons of mass destruction –nuclear, chemical, and biological- or by sponsoring terrorism.³ Additionally, rapid technological development lowers the bar to entry for non-state actors which exacerbates this increasingly dangerous operating environment. As such there is a high demand for Special Operations unique capabilities across the spectrum from peaceful cooperation through competition short of armed conflict, up to and including large-scale combat operations.

While we are prepared for continued global counterterrorism operations, SOF also executes a variety of critical missions in support of activities to counter every threat facing our Nation. The National Security Strategy (NSS) and the NDS emphasize the requirement to compete with our

¹ 2018 National Defense Strategy Unclassified Summary Page 2.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

rivals and recognize that near-peer competition reemerged as a central challenge to the U.S. and its interests. SOF is uniquely capable of effectively competing below the level of traditional armed conflict and across the spectrum of conflict as part of the Joint Force. The 57,478 active duty, 7,668 reserve and guard component, and 6,552 civilian personnel of USSOCOM plan, enable, and conduct the entire range of Special Operations activities. In today's environment, the critical missions SOF performs continue to grow in scale, importance and demand. To this point, USSOCOM sustains an average deployed force of approximately 8,300 personnel across 90 countries. Sustaining this pace would be impossible without the essential resources we are provided.

SOF Resourcing

USSOCOM and your Special Operations Forces are well resourced by the American taxpayer and Congress; we are grateful for this. In fiscal year (FY) 2017 USSOCOM's budget was \$11.8 billion with a projected increase to \$12.3 billion in FY 2018, SOF remains approximately 2% of the DoD budget. This ensures SOF is postured to operate effectively across the full range of unique capabilities. I'm forced to express my concerns, however with USSOCOM's reliance on Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding. OCO funding remains critical to ensuring SOF readiness and operational effectiveness, but in recent years, USSOCOM has relied upon OCO at nearly triple the rate of the Services. Further, approximately 90% of USSOCOM's OCO funding, finances enduring capabilities. Ultimately, we must reconcile SOF's readiness, which requires enduring structure and competencies, with the relatively temporary resources achieved through OCO funding. Migrating OCO funding to the base budget will ensure SOF maintains their hard won advances in capability and capacity over

the past two decades of sustained combat while transforming the force for future threats in a turbulent international security environment.

Combatant Command with Global Responsibilities

In the past two years, DoD assigned USSOCOM two roles, both of which I discussed in my last appearance before the committee: the Coordinating Authority to CVEO and the Coordinating Authority to Counter Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD). I want to provide an update on the progress with these roles.

As the Coordinating Authority (CA) for CVEO USSOCOM's responsibility is to provide the Department a global framework for action. While limited, doctrinally, and not constituting Command Authority, our efforts as the CA to date, resulting in quarterly, now bi-annual assessments, conducted in conjunction with our mission and interagency partners led to specific recommendations for the conduct of the overall CVEO effort. Specifically, recommendations addressed the underlying enablers which terrorist organizations use to generate and sustain their "combat power," which include foreign fighters, financing, and strategic communications. SOF CVEO operational activities, in support of Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC) objectives, deter, disrupt and destroy violent extremist organizations (VEO) globally. Our experience targeting VEO, and their global support networks, is directly applicable to our role in CWMD.

As the CWMD Coordinating Authority for the Department, we are responsible for maintaining the DoD CWMD Campaign, establishing intelligence priorities, monitoring global operations and conducting assessments. Towards that effort, we are developing a new Functional Campaign Plan to provide a comprehensive, trans-regional approach that coordinates DoD

campaign activities. In coordination with our great partner, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) we established a CWMD Fusion Center to design, coordinate, and assess this new trans-regional approach and connect to other U.S. Government (USG) departments and agencies, as well as international partners, including INTERPOL and EUROPOL. This is vital recognizing as we see some of the conflict exit the battlefield and transition to the intelligence and law enforcement realms. The Fusion Center leverages the resources and skills of multiple agencies to help achieve a multi-layered comprehensive approach to address the CWMD problem set. We continue to assess effectiveness towards national objectives, while providing resourcing and strategic recommendations to the Secretary of Defense and Chairman.

Countering VEOs and WMD are two of our country's most complex problems. SOF coordinate within the USG and with international partners at all levels – from the tactical to the strategic.

USSOCOM Priorities: Win, Transform and People.

Win the Current Fight

Countering VEO's remains the highest warfighting priority for USSOCOM. In the last year, SOF in support of the GCCs and most often by, with and through enabled partners, disrupted and degraded ISIS and AQ's directed external operation capability, degraded their revenue, disrupted foreign fighter facilitation, diminished their warfighting ability, captured hundreds of terabytes of ISIS's and AQ's information, and interrupted or blocked their media output. Despite suffering significant battlefield losses, both ISIS and AQ remain potent in terms of ideology and the means to promulgate it and determined to pursue their nihilistic objectives. We will continue to face future challenges as these groups exploit the lack of partner capacity and under-governed areas.

We remain focused on disrupting external attack capabilities, destroying or neutralizing AQ and ISIS safe havens, developing and enacting a long-term approach to defeat VEOs, and building partner capacity so host nations can achieve sustainable localized security. SOF's CVEO efforts range across GCC areas of responsibility and are an important component of an overarching whole of government approach to advance broader national security objectives to defend the Homeland, our citizens, our Allies and partners. Trans-regional threats such as ISIS and AQ require the Joint Force to work with interagency and coalition partners to target financial, material, and personnel supply chains that facilitate these terrorist organizations. Securing and holding our gains also requires a focused, coordinated effort to empower local entities within and among the populations that terrorists exploit to degrade their message and ability to recruit. These important tasks cannot be done by SOF alone and require strong, properly financed interagency partners. Ultimately, we endeavor to reduce this global threat to the local level where partner forces are capable of conducting sustainable security operations.

SOF is also engaged in countering Iran's destabilizing activities in the Middle East, which stoke sectarian tensions and set the conditions for VEOs to emerge and thrive. The threat posed by Iran and its network of partners, proxies, and associates continued during 2017. Iran took advantage of regional instability to expand its influence through partners and proxies, weapon proliferation, funding and messaging. To counter these efforts Special Operations Forces support United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) through a variety of activities in order to contain Iranian influence, discourage their destabilizing behavior and disrupt their actions. In parallel, we also endeavor to assure Israel and regional Gulf partners through foreign internal defense, security force assistance, security cooperation and other supportive activities.

North Korea's advances in its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles program poses a serious threat to the U.S. homeland and international peace and security. Accordingly, USSOCOM maintains a persistent and rotational presence on the peninsula, working closely with our South Korean and interagency partners to enhance their capabilities and prepare for future crises or conflict. We train to ensure readiness for the entire range of Special Operations contingency operations as part of the Joint Force. We are examining our force structure and capabilities on the Peninsula and across the region to optimize support to United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) and to United States Forces Korea, and our Allies.

United States European Command's (USEUCOM) efforts to counter Russian aggression remains a Special Operations priority from both an employment and sustainment of the force perspective. Russia is a strategic competitor intent on undermining U.S. global influence, and the unity of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Alliance. As part of the Joint Force, SOF provide unique options to counter Russia's use of indirect actions and unconventional warfare techniques. Integrated with USEUCOM's efforts to ensure Allies and partners are secure from military aggression or coercion, SOF maintain persistent presence and outreach in many European countries - including the Baltic nations, Poland, Romania, Ukraine, and Georgia. In partnership with our Allies and our interagency partners, USSOCOM assists in strengthening host nation and NATO capabilities - including the development of their own capable and sustainable SOF. Congress's recently approved authority for Section 1202 funding will provide us greater agility in approaching this nuanced challenge. We also support the NATO SOF Headquarters, which is integral to this strategy through their efforts to integrate, train, develop and foster lethal and professional Allied SOF capabilities. These partners are critical to deter and, if necessary, respond to Russian aggression.

China is a revisionist power intent upon expanding its regional and global influence, while developing capabilities to limit our Nation's ability to project power throughout the Indo-Pacific region and undermine U.S. influence globally. SOF support USPACOM's efforts by maintaining a persistent SOF presence in over a dozen countries in the USPACOM area of responsibility – ensuring our Allies and partners are secure from military threats and building partner capabilities to address complex threats in the region.

In summary, USSOCOM plays an integral role in opposing today's threats to our Nation, to protecting the American people, to securing our homeland, and in maintaining favorable regional balances of power. However, as we focus on today's operations we must be equally focused on required future transformation. SOF must adapt, develop, procure and field new capabilities in the interest of continuing to be a unique, lethal, and agile part of the Joint Force of tomorrow.

Transform Capabilities, Processes and Structure for Future Security Challenges

As a legislated Service-like entity, USSOCOM is charged with manning, training and equipping your Special Operations Forces as well as caring for our assigned personnel and their families. In this capacity, we must continue investment in our future capabilities. As stated in the NDS, "Sharpening our competitive edge will require creative approaches, resources, and disciplined execution."⁴ We will continue to transform our force and business practices using the resources we are provided. Creative SOF approaches and disciplined execution will increase lethality, build new partnerships and keep pace with the dynamic strategic environment.

In pursuit of increased lethality and other effects we will continue to streamline our efforts to rapidly prototype and experiment to field needed capabilities. We extensively leverage

⁴ 2018 National Defense Strategy pg.37.

commercial off the shelf (COTS) systems to ensure we have rapid solutions to the problems our operators face. Some areas of focused Research Development Testing and Evaluation and developmental investment include cyber, next-generation, Low-Observable Infiltration Platforms, airborne high-energy laser applications, automation and machine learning. We are pressing initiatives to integrate rapidly evolving technology in the fields of big data management and machine learning into all aspects of our operations and activities. We are major contributors to the ongoing Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence's Project Maven initiative to automate the time intensive process of recognizing and identifying the tremendous number of objects of interest within various full-motion video feeds. Our investment in Project Maven helps us with the processing, exploitation, and dissemination of Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) media as does Congressional support for SOF ISR capabilities through the ISR Transfer Fund appropriations in FY2016 and FY2017. These supplemental OCO appropriations for ISR ensured SOF possessed assets necessary to execute critical missions.

Cyber operations are an integral part of our global activities. SOF employ cyber tools across the full spectrum of operations. Cyber integration facilitates advanced targeting and enables freedom of maneuver for SOF and our allies and partners at the tactical level. Operationally, we coordinate and integrate cyber across the Theater Special Operations Commands as a force multiplier to GCC operations. At all levels, SOF leverage USCYBERCOM and organic SOF cyber capabilities. The importance of these cyber capabilities will only increase in the future; additional dedicated cyber resources will be required to allow USSOCOM and the Joint Force to compete with adaptive adversaries. USSOCOM strongly

supports DoD investment in "cyber defense, resilience, and the continued integration of cyber capabilities into the full spectrum of military operations."⁵

USSOCOM continues to embrace new and leading-edge networks, tools, and venues to reach the broadest markets and attract innovators in commercial industry and academia that offer solutions and capabilities for our research, development, and acquisition programs. Our SOFWERX initiative has a network of over 6,000 collaborators and contributors. SOFWERX provides a direct warfighter nomination process to identify emerging requirements. This process combines with "outside the wire" access for non-traditional technologists, entrepreneurs and other individuals with innovative solutions to solve problems rapidly. This approach provided solutions ranging from the creative application and rapid prototype modifications of COTS to the exploration of non-radio frequency communication techniques to enhance survivability in both terrestrial and aquatic environments. Current efforts include exploring opportunities with 5G networks and unlicensed high speed wireless communications, evaluating open-source software applications, and continuing "Thunder Drone" activities which focus on counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) challenges and solutions as well as opportunities to enhance our offensive use of UAS, especially in coordination with machine learning enabled capabilities. SOFWERX has benefited greatly from Congressional support. SOFWERX's efforts towards technological innovation result in rapidly fielded solutions with the potential to reduce acquisition costs not just for USSOCOM, but also for the Services.

In the last year, we conducted substantive war fighter conferences with each of the Services and we are very pleased with the outcomes of these engagements and what they portend in terms of future interoperability. The talks allowed the Services and USSOCOM to explore

⁵ 2018 NDS Unclassified Summary pg 6.

opportunities for enhanced joint integration and interoperability for current operations while establishing collaborative venues for the development of capabilities necessary for the future. The talks will gain us efficiencies through increased cooperation in the development of specific capabilities associated with CWMD, ISR, command, control, communication, computer, intelligence and information (C4I), rapid acquisition, and joint training and exercises. The engagements were crucial to improve our common operational picture, identify Special Operations-Service capability gaps and set a course to develop solutions. We intend to sustain the momentum of these annual conferences through continued engagements that enhance joint teamwork and the warfighting capability of the Joint Force. For example, during the past year, Marine Corps Systems Command leveraged the USSOCOM Sensitive Site Exploitation Program to select the next generation biometric identification device. This capability enables the verification of biometric signatures against the DoD authoritative database. Another great example is the 33 USSOCOM Light Tactical All-Terrain Vehicles (MRZR) procured by the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division combat evaluation to meet a Global Response Force operational gap resulting in a cost avoidance to the U.S. Army of \$5M in R&D funding. Furthermore, the U.S. Marine Corps' Program Executive Office Land Systems has utilized the USSOCOM's Five Year General Service Agency Blanket Purchase Agreement contract to acquire their fleet of MRZR. In all cases, USSOCOM worked closely with the U.S. Army and U.S. Marines sharing all test data, internal air transportability certifications, airdrop certifications and other information to facilitate the rapid acquisition of the MRZR by those Services. In addition to equipment we also partner with the Services, to develop facilities, most recently in USEUCOM and USPACOM to enable SOF to rapidly respond to trans-regional threats.

Modernizing key capabilities to increase lethality, includes accelerating recapitalization of air, ground, and maritime mobility systems and strike aircraft. We continue to enhance agility proactively shaping the environment by placing capability and infrastructure where we can enable agile, timely, and effective responses. USSOCOM has requested a modest increase to its resource top line for personnel and funding consistent with the Secretary's direction to build capacity and improve lethality and force planning priorities in the DoD's Program Review. The current budget supports recapitalizing platforms in addition to developing technological capabilities. Programmatically, we focus on enhancing Service-provided platforms with Major Force Program-11 funds to provide the Special Operations peculiar needs of the force. SOF effectiveness depends highly upon the Services' investment decisions. A good example is the recapitalization and procurement of the Special Operations variant of the CH-47 aircraft, which will replace 61 legacy sheet-metal airframes with new machined-framed aircraft. We are completing production engineering, and this year we will begin production of the first four of 61 aircraft. We execute this program in close collaboration with U.S. Army's CH-47F Block II effort. The U.S. Army is providing common production, labor, and material costs, while USSOCOM is recapitalizing dynamic components and Special Operations Aviation unique equipment including Survivability Systems, Multimode-Radars, and Airborne Mission Networking capabilities. The Special Operations variant of the CH-47 aircraft enables USSOCOM to reliably meet both current and future, critical and time-sensitive, Special Operations vertical lift mission requirements. In addition, we invest in capabilities necessary for the denied battlefields of the future. This includes submersibles, terrain following / avoidance, all-weather radar, advanced electronic attack capabilities, countermeasures and precision

munitions. Special Operations peculiar precision guided munitions for airborne platforms are funded to full rate production levels.

Similarly, we recognize that as technology advances, we must also advance how we apply and capitalize upon that technology. In addition to advancements in tools and technology, we find and hire the right people and partner with various agencies within the DoD, the interagency and international organizations and entities. To keep pace with the accelerating rate of change, let alone get in front of it, we must build agility - both operational and institutional - into all that we do. We constantly improve command and control capabilities, organization, and partnerships.

While USSOCOM works with our interagency partners to strengthen America's alliances, we also focus on expanding partnerships with key stakeholders and developing new partnerships. In addition to the previously mentioned relationships with the other Combatant Commands, the Services, commercial industry and academia, we expanded cooperation with the defense agencies, the interagency, Allies and partners. Ensuring SOF understand and can seamlessly operate within the vast array of USG entities and with our international counterparts is key to Special Operations success now and into the future.

We depend extensively upon the capabilities that reside within the defense agencies and commands, such as the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM), the Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA) and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA). The relationship between USSOCOM's Sensitive Site Exploitation Program and DIA was established in 2008. Recently, DIA Advanced Technologies Intelligence and the National Exploitation Center were instrumental in the development of a new state-of-the-art capability for USSOCOM's

exploitation efforts which provide SOF enhanced capabilities at deployed locations to analyze explosives, narcotics, fingerprints, documents, and electronic media. In collaboration with DLA and USTRANSCOM, we used their expertise and wide network of resources to feed, fuel, and support operations down to the most remote and austere locations. USSOCOM also adopted the DLA hosted Defense Property Accountability System, an existing DoD Technology, as the auditable accountability system for Special Operations peculiar equipment which is just one tool we use to ensure good stewardship of taxpayer resources. DISA provides resilient network services to ensure continuous connectivity to mission critical information as we manage the fourth largest C4I system in the Department. We see evidence of our adversaries taking COTS technologies and reconfiguring and employing them as weapons and surveillance systems, such as small UAS. The recent integration of Joint Improvised-Threat Defeat Organization with DTRA provides us with an expanded ability to counter these improvised threats confronting the force today.

In addition to leveraging the Department's strengths, we invest heavily in relationships with interagency partners; we have approximately 40 Special Operations liaison officers working across 16 agencies in order to ensure interoperability to support national objectives. This is but one touchpoint that SOF has with interagency colleagues. SOF face tough challenges around the world, working side-by-side with counterparts from the Departments of State, Treasury, Justice, Energy, Homeland, the Intelligence Community, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and others. These partners are critical to mission success and advancing national interests. The U.S. cannot succeed in facing today's national security challenges with the military alone. We rely on the collaboration and support of interagency partners for enduring whole-of-

government solutions to the problems the Nation faces, and also stand ready to support interagency-led efforts where we are needed.

The SOF relationship with the Department of State and USAID is one example of how we work with our interagency partners in the interest of pursuing sustainable security operations. Together, we more effectively coordinate efforts to incorporate security, development, and diplomacy across the entire continuum of U.S. government activities. We can optimize effectiveness of U.S. support to advance development, diplomatic priorities, and promote U.S. national security interests by working together. We share the goal of improving country capacity, resilience, and self-reliance in order for a country to move beyond the need for assistance and creating opportunities for a country to independently advance development and maintain their own security.

As part of transforming, and in line with the NSS, we seek to strengthen alliances and build stronger international partnerships. International partners provide complementary and sometimes unique capabilities and forces to the fight. For over a decade, USSOCOM's Sovereign Challenge program opened the doors to the military leaders of over 125 sovereign states via their defense and military service attaches assigned to Washington embassies. Over 1,700 Sovereign Challenge alumni returned home to positions of greater responsibility in their respective countries' military forces and societies. Working through the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD SO/LIC) and the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy, we have negotiated formal agreements with 23 nations, who now have full-time representation on my staff. We have 20 U.S. Special Operations Liaison Officers assigned to U.S. Embassies. This unparalleled international network translates into greater global collaboration and synchronization across both the U.S. and Allied Force. Foreign

partner SOF played a significant role in the defeat of ISIS in support of USCENTCOM and 25 Allies and partners are providing SOF to ongoing campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. These mutually-beneficial partnerships are focused on improving international SOF capabilities and their ability to operate with us, which is USSOCOM's responsibility under Title 10, Section 167. Additionally, we've used established bi-lateral agreements to reduce costs associated with sustaining forces worldwide, such as acquiring life-saving freeze-dried plasma from our French Allies.

Congress's support is key to SOF efforts to work by, with, and through partners. The foresight of Congress in codifying what was previously Section 1208, a temporary authority in the FY 2005 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), into Title 10 under Section 127e allows USSOCOM to spend up to \$100M to provide full-spectrum support to a foreign force whose unique access and capabilities support SOF operations to combat terrorism and achieve results. In FY 2017, we expended nearly \$80M in OCO funding to resource 21 programs with measurable regional and global impact. This is another area where we work closely with our State Department and other interagency partners to ensure our programs and activities are nested within whole of government strategies and contributing to achieving broad national security objectives.

Similarly, Section 1209 of FY 2015 NDAA— allowed us to build a 50K+ force of Vetted Syrian Opposition to attack ISIS and, with U.S. and coalition support, expel ISIS from 98% of the areas under their control in Syria. Since receiving Sec 1209 authority in FY 2015, USSOCOM has executed \$868M to procure ammunition, weapons, vehicles, communications and other equipment in support of USCENTCOM's effort to defeat ISIS – Sect 1209 is the decisive ingredient in the military defeats ISIS suffered in Syria this year.

In a similar manner, I would like to thank Congress for passing Section 1202 of this year's NDAA. Section 1202 provides up to \$10M during each of FY 2018 through 2020 to provide support to foreign forces, irregular forces, groups, or individuals engaged in supporting or facilitating ongoing or future authorized irregular warfare operations by SOF. This new authority will provide us greater agility in countering the malign activities of competitors short of armed conflict by partnering with the kinds of forces best suited to address the growing hybrid threat to U.S. interests and to Allies and partners. We will apply Section 1202 in a measured manner, in coordination with the State Department and interagency, and I am confident the enhanced partnerships formed will pay dividends long into the future.

As we transform the organization to increase lethality, build partnerships and evolve to meet tomorrow's challenges, we appreciate the support of Congress to provide the authorities to make the reforms to keep the leading edge. The Command appreciates the support of Congress in enacting Section 809 in the FY 2018 NDAA requiring a report on extension of development, acquisition, and sustainment authorities of the military departments to USSOCOM. Providing USSOCOM service-like authorities for acquisitions of Special Operations peculiar equipment permits the Command to better meet expectations established by the Secretary of Defense, which seeks to instill budget discipline and effective resource management, develop a culture of rapid and meaningful innovation, streamline requirements and acquisition processes, and promote responsible risk taking and personal initiative. The USSOCOM staff is actively supporting the Secretary of Defense's review of Service authorities and looks forward to the outcome of this review.

We are also attentive to and appreciative of ASD SO/LIC's revised role. Section 922 of the FY 2018 NDAA which formally codifies the position of the ASD SO/LIC into the chain of

supervision between the Secretary of Defense and the Commander USSOCOM for Title 10, man, train, and equip responsibilities. We are working closely with ASD West and his staff to ensure he can fulfill his responsibilities for advocacy and oversight in the most efficient manner possible which we think will result in the optimized integration of USSOCOM in the DoD.

While these advances in technology, procurement, partnership and authorities enhance SOF, it doesn't change the fact that people are the most important asset. Understanding and communicating across cultures and languages, building and maintaining effective networks of action and working with partners to achieve common interests all demand the highest quality people with keen interpersonal skills. The creativity, initiative and spirit of the people who comprise the Special Operations Force cannot be overstated. They are our greatest asset.

People—USSOCOM's Most Precious Asset

USSOCOM continues to recruit, assess, and select the very best. We then train and empower our teammates to solve the most daunting national security problems. We also manage people throughout their Special Operations careers. My most sacred responsibility is to take care of our people. To do that, we must continue to build resiliency and provide the best possible care for our service members and their families.

A constant primary focus for the USSOCOM team is the operations tempo, personnel tempo (PERSTEMPO) and readiness of your Special Operations Force. The latest calculations from across Special Operations show that the vast majority of currently deployed Special Operations Personnel are adhering to the Secretary of Defense directed goal of 1.2 deployment to dwell (D2D) for Active Forces and 1.5 for Reserves Forces. Currently 12% of deployed Special Operations Forces have a D2D of less than 1.2, and 3% of the force is currently deployed below

1.1. This represents a significant improvement over the last ten years, but we still have further to go. The SOF component commanders are working to bring the entire force into compliance with the directed D2D goal. We are implementing a number of initiatives to do this. USSOCOM is using the Defense Ready program to track individuals' D2D ratios and PERSTEMPO, allowing leaders at all levels to track and forecast a person's time away from the unit and family. To balance demand for SOF, USSOCOM instituted measures to satisfy requirements at a rate the operational forces can sustain while banking readiness for future threats. This ensures service components are supporting the GCCs, with a tailored force, while maintaining a 1.2 D2D ratio. As part of this process USSOCOM evaluates missions which don't require SOF unique capabilities which may be transferred to the conventional forces or international partners. We are aggressively addressing the D2D challenge and expect to achieve the Department standard by the end of the 2018 calendar year.

Without a doubt, the high operations tempo and PERSTEMPO challenge our teammates. The Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) program was founded to address these challenges, and we are deeply grateful for Congress's support for this priority effort. POTFF is vital to ensuring the physical, psychological, spiritual, and social resilience of service members. POTFF's investment and preventative efforts directly contribute to reduced injuries and rapid rehabilitation, and enhance force retention, career longevity and the overall health of the Special Operations Force. Simply put, it is our "stay well" plan. POTFF is integral to the way we do business and how we keep Special Operations Teammates balanced and prepared to shoulder the demands we place upon them. We are adopting innovative practices and technologies to meet the challenges, and indicative of success, we have been asked by several of the other Services to share best practices and lessons learned. Specifically your passage of Section 555 of the FY 2018

NDAA making USSOCOM's family programs authority permanent ensures the health of the force.

Key to the POTFF strategy and overall readiness is also ensuring we take care of families. I deeply appreciate that Congress allows USSOCOM to tailor family programs that meet the specific needs of the SOF community. You enable us to conduct pre and post-deployment programs, SOF unit orientations, and other events that strengthen relationships between warriors, their spouses, and their children.

USSOCOM has made tremendous progress reducing suicides, but I'll be blunt – we must do better. I'm working with the Services and leading academics to refine the suicide prevention strategies, and we are addressing the underlying cognitive processes that lead to suicides. I am pleased to tell you over the past five years suicide rates have declined by 70%. I attribute this success to leaders at every level embracing behavioral health and care as being equally important as physical fitness. We are trending in the right direction, but remain keenly focused on suicide reduction. We are also developing suicide prevention training for families, given we have found that spouses are often the first to notice when their partners are struggling. We will work vigorously to provide the resources and services to the SOF community that will help further reduce the number of suicides within the force, families, civilians, and contractor teammates. Even one suicide within the force is too many.

In conjunction with the POTFF effort, I am greatly appreciative of Congress's support by authorizing USSOCOM to have its Warrior Care Program; peer to the Service programs, it is often heralded as the gold standard. When the resilience of our warriors and their families is severely challenged due to wounds, injury, or illness, our Warrior Care Program provides advocacy and care coordination through the recovery and rehabilitation process. The primary

objective is to retain our highly skilled people and return them to their units. With the highest retention rate of any of the service programs, the Warrior Care Program ensures that USSOCOM is able to best capitalize on the immense investment of time and resources applied to your SOF, enhancing readiness.

Readiness extends to ensuring Special Operations Teammates operate in a safe and healthy military culture. Leaders across USSOCOM are committed to advancing a climate where sexual harassment and sexual assault are not tolerated, condoned, or ignored. Commanders empower their subordinates to take appropriate action to protect personnel from these and any other inappropriate, unsafe or criminal behaviors which, if unchecked, degrade unit morale, effectiveness and, ultimately, lethality.

In response to guidance from the fiscal year 2018 NDAA House Armed Services Committee Report, we implemented an enterprise-wide assessment of culture and accountability within SOF. The assessment was designed and administered by organizational behavior specialists and collected additional data on sexual misconduct, illicit drug use, accountability, and unauthorized media release. This survey was incredibly important to us. I personally encouraged the voluntary and anonymous feedback from all members of USSOCOM to ensure a deep and academically rigorous analysis of our teammates' thoughts and feelings, vetted by subject matter experts, Inspector General, and Judge Advocates.

I am pleased to report that USSOCOM is improving across many key areas, according to the survey. The data indicates that SOF continues to trend below the incident rates of the Services when compared to the DoD, and we are seeing an increase in SOF using behavior health services. The survey also showed broad consensus that SOF leaders hold personnel accountable who exhibit problematic behavior and demonstrate poor judgment. USSOCOM is a transparent

and accountable command and I am encouraged that SOF people value the accountability, integrity, and commitment to honorable service deep within the core of the force.

In addition to caring for Special Operations Personnel, I want to thank Congress for the support to educational and training programs. I appreciate your consideration of the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) request to obtain the same Title 10 Authority that the DoD Regional Centers and the traditional Professional Military Education institutions have to rapidly hire faculty with expertise in selected disciplines not normally found within the military and civil service communities. This will give JSOU the flexibility to rapidly hire the best-qualified faculty to provide the best advanced education to personnel. This Title 10 authority also gives JSOU the option of five or six-year appointments for top performers versus the longer hiring period and permanency of traditional Title 5 authority—this will allow us to hire the best, most relevant instructors on a continuing basis.

Closing Remarks

Thank you for this opportunity today to speak with all of you and thank you for your steadfast and continued support of USSOCOM and your phenomenal Special Operators. I look forward to continuing the productive and transparent relationship we maintain with Congress as we face and overcome the many challenges the country faces.

**General Raymond A. Thomas III Commander
U.S. Special Operations Command**

General Raymond A. Thomas III currently serves as the 11th Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla.

Prior to assuming command of USSOCOM, Gen. Thomas served as Commander, Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), Fort Bragg, N.C.

GEN Thomas' other assignments as a general officer include: Associate Director for Military Affairs at the Central Intelligence Agency; Commanding General, NATO Special Operations Component Command – Afghanistan; Deputy Commanding General, JSOC; Deputy Director for Special Operations, The Joint Staff in the Pentagon; Assistant Division Commander, 1st Armor Division in Iraq; an Assistant Commanding General, JSOC.

Prior to being promoted to brigadier general, Gen. Thomas also served as the JSOC Chief of Staff and Director of Operations. His other formative and key, joint and special operations assignments include: Commander, Joint Task Force – Bravo, Soto Cano, Honduras; Commander, 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Savannah, Ga.; and Commander, B Squadron, 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment – Delta, Fort Bragg, N.C.

He is a graduate of the US Army War College, Carlisle, Penn., and the Naval Command and Staff College, Newport, R.I.

Gen. Thomas is a native of Philadelphia, Pa. He attended the United States Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., and was commissioned an infantry second lieutenant upon graduation in 1980. Gen. Thomas and his wife Barbara have two sons – Tony and Michael.

(Current as of March 2016)

**WITNESS RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ASKED DURING
THE HEARING**

FEBRUARY 15, 2018

RESPONSE TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MS. STEFANIK

Secretary WEST. In the FY 2019 budget rollout, DOD indicated that the FY 2020 DOD budget and future plan are to reduce reliance on OCO significantly. USSOCOM will be a part of that shift from OCO to the base budget. Congressional support is critical in shifting OCO to the base budget. OCO constitutes one-third of USSOCOM's FY 2019 budget request. At this time, we believe that approximately 90 percent of USSOCOM's requested OCO is enduring.

Increasing base funding will result in more effective implementation of readiness and modernization efforts over the long term. For example, it will improve procurement of warfighter equipment (e.g., special operations forces (SOF) fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft modernization; SOF maritime undersea and surface capabilities; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); and tactical vehicle modernization). In terms of readiness, it will improve SOF combat units' ability to plan and implement training in a reliable and consistent manner. [See page 9.]

RESPONSE TO QUESTION SUBMITTED BY MR. HICE

General THOMAS. The command conducted extensive market research in order to ensure we have captured both lessons learned from the current POTFF programs and contract, but also from other major source selections the command has recently executed and modified the RFP accordingly. Some of the most significant changes are outlined below. We experienced performance issues and turnover related to the disparate salaries offered for the same labor categories and at times within the same geographic locations by the various companies supporting these requirements. We did not anticipate that some subcontractors would pay 20%-30% less annually than others. Additionally, direct salaries have in some instances limited our ability to fill positions, either because they are much lower than those offered by other agencies or too low for incentivizing performance in remoter locations such as Cannon AFB, NM. Therefore, the RFP includes additional requirements for a more in-depth price analysis focused on the total direct compensation offered to employees, regardless of which prime or subcontractor is providing the employee in order to ensure commensurate compensation packages are being offered across all team members (both prime and subcontractors) and the surrounding labor markets, as well as ensuring they will have the ability to retain the current incumbent personnel IAW FAR provision 52.222-46. Failure to effectively manage subcontractors to ensure consistency in the support across the entire POTFF program has caused several performance challenges. Therefore, the RFP and the Government Quality Assurance and oversight processes include a greater emphasis on subcontract management and holding the prime contractor accountable for their subcontractor performance. This includes such things as requiring offerors to address how they will ensure the proper flow down of all contract requirements, handle subcontractors who are performing poorly, or those team members that are unable to effectively retain or recruit personnel. Moreover, offerors will be required to ensure processes and procedures are standardized across their team as well as describe how their retention plans will ensure the ability to maintain the required technical expertise and allow for developmental growth/career progression. Five years ago, the RFP had a larger focus on ensuring the companies (holistically across their proposed team) demonstrated extensive knowledge of both the various Special Operations units being supported and the POTFF programs (i.e. both Human Performance Programs and the Psychological Resiliency). However, we found that although they should still have some understanding of the SOF non-traditional training environment, it is not as essential to have companies who are "experts" in the POTFF domains or SOF units, but rather just expertise resident in the key personnel proposed to perform the recruiting and vetting of the service providers that understand the qualifications (i.e. having an Operational psychologist background). Additionally, companies that have demonstrated experience in the human resource-like functions (recruiting, managing credentials, etc.) Therefore, the RFP includes language that focuses more on the recruitment and retention of personnel rather than the knowledge of existing programs. Offerors are now required to provide labor rates for all 21 labor categories

across all 26 geographical locations in order to avoid delays and the possibility of paying unreasonably high labor rates once we are in a sole source environment post award. The transition requirements were very different 5 years ago when we were first establishing the “enterprise” contract. The number of current incumbent personnel from existing contracts that were being consolidated into the enterprise was much lower than the number of incumbent personnel currently working under the current POTFF contract (approx. 346). Therefore, the RFP contains a greater emphasis on transition and ensuring the offeror’s plan demonstrates an understanding of and the ability to retain those critical “No Fail” incumbent positions (identified within PWS, Appendix 2) and how they will mitigate the risks associated with the loss of those existing relationships that have been built over time within the components. The revised Performance Work Statement contains revised qualifications for some existing labor categories, the removal of one labor category and five new labor categories that were identified by the component commands and to support emerging POTFF initiatives. The new categories include the following:

- Neuropsychologist: To support SOF neurocognitive psychological baselining efforts
- Data Scientist I & II: To replace the baccalaureate trained “Data Analyst” labor category on the previous POTFF contract. The POTFF requires a higher level of analytic capability than previously provided. The Data Scientists I & II require a masters degree and Ph.D. respectively.
- Psychometrist: To support SOF neurocognitive and psychological baselining, and assessment/selection activities.
- Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner: To address specific gaps in access to care. Primarily for medication/medical management.
- Senior Strength & Conditioning Specialist: To provide greater responsiveness to a units’ requirements.

[See page 15.]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING

FEBRUARY 15, 2018

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MS. SPEIER

Ms. SPEIER. General Thomas, you mentioned SOCOM's continued coordination with embassies in countries and regions where SOCOM is present. How might cuts to FY19 State Department funding impact SOCOM's missions around the globe? How would an increase in defense funding with a simultaneous decrease in diplomacy funding affect the success of these missions in FY19/20 and in fiscal years to come?

General THOMAS. The SOCOM position is that there will be no direct impact to SOCOM's ability to carry out missions around the globe. However, if Embassy staffing is impacted by a lack of funding, some of SOCOM's specific missions could be indirectly and negatively impacted on a case-by-case basis. Politically sensitive missions in certain host nations require embassy oversight and coordination. A shortfall in staffing could slow or even disrupt execution. Additionally, there is a potential that staffing shortfalls could lead to greater DOS/USEMB reliance on SOCOM elements that work within embassies and have operational funding like Military Information Support Teams (MISTs) and Civilian/Military Support Elements (CMSEs). A reduction of embassy staff could potentially degrade or make it more difficult to coordinate w/host nation personnel for proposed SOF activities (e.g. Joint Combined Exercise Training (JCET) and Counter-Narcotics Training (CNT) events). Additionally, any cuts to Title 22 funding overseen by the State Department may negatively impact host nation willingness and ability to cooperate with SOCOM, as well as degrade future performance of host nation forces." Strategically, any diminution in the U.S. government's ability to drive diplomatic solutions to today's problems, due to decreased staff, funding, programs, will likely mean conflicts and the conditions that lead to conflict will endure, and SOCOM's ops tempo and deployments will be affected.

Ms. SPEIER. General Thomas, USSOCOM continues to use "live tissue training," which uses live animals for teaching combat medics, a practice abandoned by virtually every U.S. hospital and medical school due to its high cost and the rise of more effective simulators and virtual reality for training. How much did SOCOM spend on live tissue training in each of the last five fiscal years? How much does SOCOM intend to spend on this training in FY18? How many animals were killed for SOCOM's live tissue training exercises in the past five fiscal years? To what extent has SOCOM evaluated the long-term cost savings that would result from switching to simulators for medical training? What was the finding of this evaluation?

General THOMAS. A single funding breakdown solely for live tissue training (LTT) is not available. USSOCOM does not conduct or fund live tissue training as a separate activity from Medical Readiness Training. (Medical Readiness Training, as defined in DODI 1322.24, includes all training for personnel, medical or non-medical, to treat combat wounds and injuries; has both initial and sustainment requirements.) The resources used to conduct LTT are the same facilities, ranges, instructors, support personnel, vehicles, equipment, and supply items necessary to conduct non-animal based medical readiness training. These resources are used throughout the "crawl, walk, run" progression of medical readiness training, of which LTT is a small, but critically important component. The following numbers represent the number of live animal models used by USSOCOM personnel for the years that documents are maintained. All activities are conducted in accordance with animal welfare regulations and policies, approved by an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), and use humane euthanasia per the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Guidelines for the euthanasia of animals:

FY2017: animals used = 5,244; personnel trained = 7,261

FY2016: animals = 6,428; personnel trained = 9,823 (note: includes Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) training and animals used in field training)

FY2015: animals = 6,469; personnel trained = 9,925 (note: includes SERE training and animals used in field training)

Note: DODI 3216.01, Use of Animals in DOD Programs, directs animal use records be retained for three years beyond the end of the RDT&E or training event.

Since 2015, USSOCOM has actively pursued high-fidelity, medical simulation and virtual reality training technologies through our annual broad agency announcements and technical experimentation events. Additionally, USSOCOM has worked with the DOD Program Executive Officer—Simulation, Training, and Instrumentation (Joint Program Manager—Medical Modeling & Simulation) and the Defense Health Agency's (DHA) Joint Program Committee (JPC)-1 in an effort to develop and employ the most advanced medical modeling and simulation technologies available. The following figures represent the DOD Science and Technology Medical Simulation investment portfolio provided by the Director, JPC-1 in reference to the 14 Feb 2018 HASC briefing:

FY12—\$44.3M; FY13—\$20.0M; FY14—\$16.8M; FY15—\$20.5M; FY16—\$24.0M; FY17—\$23.5M; FY18—\$20.0M; FY19—\$28.0M (projected)

Many of the currently available medical simulation tools are the products of Department of Defense investments (e.g., MATT® Series 1500 Trauma Trainer, AirwayPlus Lifecast (APL) Upper Torso Trainer® (Kforce Government Solutions, Inc.), and the TraumaMan®System (Simulab Corporation)).

USSOCOM will continue to support the Department's efforts to move towards training simulator technologies where a synthetic patient model could fully replace the use of animals in USSOCOM's combat casualty care training curricula.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. WILSON

Mr. WILSON. Secretary West, I would like to discuss some of your efforts in information operations. Specifically, what I am concerned about is the dispersion of extremist elements from the Middle East as our military efforts against ISIS and al-Qaida continue to be successful. Many of these individuals are fleeing to Europe, Africa and Central Asia and attempting to reconstitute operations in those areas. Part of reconstituting operations includes disseminating extremist propaganda and attempting to radicalize and recruit locals in those areas. Are you concerned about this? What are we doing to establish information operations in these areas to counter the propaganda and recruitment efforts of extremist organizations? Is this enough?

I am particularly concerned about Africa and I feel that you must have the capability to rapidly establish information operations to counter threats as they arise. To ensure that approaches and messages are appropriate to the varied languages and cultures in areas of Africa targeted by extremists, effective information operations should leverage the unique abilities of local nationals to develop locally tailored platforms and messages. SOCOM has leveraged such a model with significant success, resulting in message dissemination that undermines extremist activities and messages within hours, not days. Integral to this model is a monitoring and evaluation system that allows SOCOM to closely, and in near real time, monitor the messages themselves, and their impact. What do you need to replicate this model in other operations?

In your opinion, what, if any, changes to authorities might help you conduct more effective information operations?

Secretary WEST. The Department of Defense (DOD) remains concerned about violent extremist organizations' efforts to propagandize, radicalize, and recruit in Europe, Africa, and Central Asia as we militarily defeat ISIS and al-Qaeda. DOD has already been conducting Military Information Support Operations (MISO) to counter radicalization and recruitment in those areas either directly or working by, with, and through our allies and partners. The Secretary of Defense recently directed U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) to consolidate DOD's MISO web operations into a global operating model in support of the Geographic Combatant Commands to expand the competitive space against our adversaries in contested zones. USSOCOM will leverage its unique abilities and previous lessons learned as DOD develops the implementation plan for this effort. The DOD has sufficient statutory authority to conduct information operations.

Mr. WILSON. General Thomas, it seems to me that rapid response is especially important in spaces where violent extremists, Russians, and other foreign actors are able to influence the information environment much more quickly than we are. I have taken note of an information operations model that SOCOM is leveraging that has been particularly effective. It includes training and otherwise enabling trusted local nationals—who fluently speak the language with the proper dialect and intimately understand local history and customs—to develop and amplify messaging that undermines extremist activities and messages. This model enables rapid relevant responses to destabilizing messages and events in near real-time, not days or weeks, while simultaneously allowing SOCOM to closely monitor messages and im-

pact. Our European allies are also leveraging a similar model with great success. What steps are you taking to replicate this model and share these best practices with other commands within DOD that engage in information operations?

General THOMAS. USSOCOM deploys Military Information Support Teams (MIST) to conduct Military Information Support Operations (MISO) in direct support of Geographic Combatant Commanders' (GCC) military objectives—within and outside of areas of hostilities—with Chief of Mission concurrence. This support includes advising and assisting partner nations' information professionals—who fluently speak local languages with the proper dialect and intimately understand local history and customs—to develop and amplify messaging that undermines adversary activities and increases our partners' abilities to effectively address shared security concerns in their regions. Finally, USSOCOM leverages experience developing counter terrorism MISO programs to assist GCCs as they develop MISO programs that provide authorities under which combatant commanders can more quickly and effectively plan and execute MISO in support to achieve their assigned missions.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. LAMBORN

Mr. LAMBORN. Do you think section 922 of the FY17 NDAA gave you the tools you need to be effective in providing oversight of USSOCOM or does this committee need to do more to assist you?

Secretary WEST. The DOD is continuing to look at how to best implement 922 as an important component of the new NDS's emphasis on reform. SO/LIC has completed a number of important actions that lay the groundwork for full and successful implementation of Section 922. Examples include:

- The Deputy Secretary of Defense designated ASD(SO/LIC) as a member of the Deputy's Management Action Group (in addition to membership by the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy).
- The Deputy Secretary of Defense designated ASD(SO/LIC) as a participant in selected Special Access Programs Oversight Council meetings.
- The Deputy Secretary of Defense delegated to ASD(SO/LIC) approval authority for selected civilian personnel actions equivalent to Military Department Secretaries.
- The Deputy Secretary of Defense approved formal establishment of the Special Operations Policy and Oversight Council (SOPC) and approved a Department of Defense Directive on the SOPC.
- The Deputy Secretary of Defense provided fiscal guidance to ASD(SO/LIC).

Additionally, over the next year, ASD(SO/LIC) expects to approve USSOCOM's budget submission and jointly approve guidance documents

Mr. LAMBORN. Specifically, what has your office done to assess USSOCOM's Preservation of the Force and Families (POTFF) program? Based on your substantial background in the business sector, do you think a personal services contract is the best approach? What are the lessons learned from the previous five years that you want SOCOM to implement during your tenure as ASD SO/LIC?

Secretary WEST. OSD has conducted several assessments of USSOCOM's POTFF Program in which SO/LIC either participated or provided coordination. Specifically, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness commissioned a 2015 MITRE Corporation study of USSOCOM's POTFF Program. In addition, the Office of the Director of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation (CAPE) is currently completing an evaluation of the POTFF Program. SO/LIC was provided the completed MITRE report and will also receive CAPE's findings. We are committed to ensuring that USSOCOM's POTFF Program is an effective and properly resourced and managed program with appropriate SO/LIC oversight.

Per 10 USC §1091, personal services contractors are authorized for the POTFF Program. As medical professionals, and due to the embedded nature of POTFF Program personnel, it is important that POTFF Program personnel are under continuous supervision and control of a Government officer or employee. Moreover, as when credentialed by the medical treatment facility, liability concerns dictate the use of personal services contractors. However, DOD is fully committed to ensuring that USSOCOM's POTFF Program is an effective and properly resourced and managed program that is subject to appropriate SO/LIC oversight.

One of the most important lessons learned is demonstrating return on investment (ROI) of U.S. taxpayer dollars, and so we are interested in the long-term ROI of the POTFF Program in order to evaluate the existing program more thoroughly and improve the effectiveness of POTFF efforts. What is required is statistical tracking. USSOCOM is synchronizing efforts to identify and capture relevant statistical data more accurately to show long-term ROI. We will work with USSOCOM to ensure

the POTFF Program's effectiveness in supporting special operations forces' readiness.

Mr. LAMBORN. This committee has been briefed on the benefits of the POTFF program and the associated metrics of success. The briefings seem to center on the special operator's physical enhancements. What seems missing from every briefing to date, are the metrics and outcomes associated with the behavioral health part of the program. What are the behavioral outcomes you are trying to achieve with the program and how are you measuring them?

General THOMAS. It is important to note that all of SOCOM's clinical behavioral healthcare personnel are funded by the Defense Health Agency and privileged to practice through local Medical Treatment Facilities. With this in mind, the DOD and Services have required processes for monitoring quality and effectiveness for behavioral health providers. The command does monitor rates of diagnoses, suicide behaviors, and access to care among other indicators. Since the implementation of POTFF, the rates of depression, Post-traumatic stress, and alcohol abuse have remained stable or in some instances declined. Notably, the number of suicides has dropped by nearly 70%.

The command is currently developing and testing technologies and processes for conducting psychological and neurocognitive assessments for SOF. This data will promote early intervention and also provide a solid foundation of data from which the command may assess the effectiveness of POTFF and other programs.

Mr. LAMBORN. Is participation in the POTFF program mandatory? If so, how do measure participation and how does the data makes its way into the special operator's official medical record? What happens with the family support data?

General THOMAS. Participation in the Human Performance Program is mandatory. All operators must be assessed twice a year using criteria specific to SOF, and based on those assessments Human Performance Programs are customized to the needs of the individual operator. Other aspects of the program, such as behavioral health, are voluntary, but encouraged by leaders at all levels. Since beginning the POTFF in 2012, the number of SOF having used behavioral health has doubled and POTFF's embedded service providers routinely rank highest in satisfaction and utility when compared with other sources of behavioral healthcare. We believe that the presence of behavioral health providers embedded within the units, along with leadership support, has impacted the stigma of seeking care. Although we still have work to do in this area, we have made significant progress.

Many of the professional disciplines within the POTFF are credentialed medical providers. These providers include: physical therapists, athletic trainers, performance dieticians, social workers, psychologists and nurse case managers. As such, these providers are required to document their clinical work in the electronic health record. The local credentialing authority, typically the medical treatment facility commander, also provides routine quality assurance and oversight as with any other medical provider on an installation.

With regard to family support data, aside from the authority granted to SOCOM to conduct family programs, the command is unable to support family support activities. This limitation was reinforced by Congress in 2014. For those programs that SOCOM is permitted to execute under Title X Sec 1788a, each activity is assessed and reported to Congress annually. SOCOM also works closely with the Services and OSD's Office of Family Policy to meet the needs of our families. OSD and the Services have been highly responsive to SOCOM's requirements.

Mr. LAMBORN. Do you think the Services should adopt a POTFF-like program to support their respective forces and families?

General THOMAS. The Services would likely benefit from adopting a POTFF-like capability tailored to their particular needs. SOCOM has engaged with each of the Services, OSD and partner nation forces regarding the structure and programmatic details of the POTFF program. Currently, each of the Services is planning or testing some variant of the POTFF program. SOCOM implemented the POTFF to specifically address pressures on special operations personnel and their families. While the stressors and occupational requirements for service members and families within the conventional forces may differ somewhat from those experienced by SOF, the underlying principles of POTFF are applicable in any military setting. Embedding multidisciplinary teams within tactical units, no matter the Service, is a sound approach to enhancing the quality of life and readiness of Service Members and their families.

Mr. LAMBORN. As your senior in the administrative chain of command, what do you think ASD SO/LIC's role should be in overseeing the promotions and professional military education compared to the Military Departments?

General THOMAS. ASD SO/LIC should be afforded the opportunity to coordinate on Service changes to promotion and professional military education policies and

processes, prior to publication and implementation, to ensure SOF equities are considered. The latest assessment shows the majority of Special Operations Forces continue to experience promotion selection rates that are comparable to, or better than, the rates of their peers in the conventional forces. Additionally, professional military education opportunities for Special Operations personnel are adequately available in the appropriate Military department.

